The Motor Pirate

By

G. Sidney Paternoster

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By

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With a Frontispiece by Charles R. Sykes

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* * * * MCMVI

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	MAINLY ABOUT MYSELF	1
II.	THE COMPTON CHAMBERLAIN OUTRAGE	9
III.	WHEREIN I MEET THE PIRATE	21
IV.	CONCERNING MY RIVAL	36
V.	THE COLONEL DREAMS AND I AWAKEN	48
VI.	I AM ARRESTED	59
VII.	I MAKE FRIENDS WITH INSPECTOR FORREST, C.I.D.	71
VIII.	MURDER	81
IX.	EXPLAINS A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE	92
X.	DESCRIBING A RIDE WITH THE PIRATE	104
XI.	IN WHICH THE PIRATE HOLDS UP THE BRIGHTON MAIL	113
XII.	HOW WE EXCHANGE SHOTS WITH THE PIRATE	123
XIII.	OF THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING WOUNDED	135
XIV.	A CLOUD APPEARS ON LOVE'S HORIZON	145
XV.	A CLUE AT LAST	155
XVI.	I COMMIT A BURGLARY	165
XVII.	STORM	176
XVIII.	IN WHICH THE PIRATE APPEARS IN A FROLICSOME HUMOUR	187

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	A Hot Scent	196
XX.	Relates How the Pirate Holds up an August Personage	207
XXI.	We Plan an Ambush	218
XXII.	Gone Away	228
XXIII.	Saved	240
XXIV.	Revelations	249

THE MOTOR PIRATE

CHAPTER I

MAINLY ABOUT MYSELF

Of course every one has heard of the Motor Pirate. No one indeed could help doing so unless he or she, as the case may be, happened to be in some part of the world where newspapers never penetrate; since for months his doings were the theme of every gossip in the country, and his exploits have filled columns of every newspaper from the moment of his first appearance until the day when the reign of terror he had inaugurated upon the roads ended as suddenly and as sensationally as it had begun. Who the owner of the pirate car was? Whence he came? Whither he went? These are questions which have exercised minds innumerable; but though there have been nearly as many theories propounded as there were brains at work propounding them, so far no informed account of the man or his methods has been made public.

Nearly twelve months have now elapsed since he was

last heard of, and already a number of myths have grown up about his mysterious personality. For instance, it is not true, as I saw asserted in a sensational evening paper the other day, that the Motor Pirate was in the habit of abducting every young and attractive woman who happened to be travelling in any of the cars he held up. On only one occasion did he abduct a lady, and in that case there were special circumstances with which the public have never been made acquainted. His deeds were quite black enough without further blackening with printer's ink, and it would be a pity if the real Motor Pirate were lost sight of in mythical haze such as has gathered about the name of his great prototype, Dick Turpin.

It has occurred to me, therefore, to tell the story of his doings—it would be impossible for any mortal man to give an absolutely detailed account of his life and actions—but I know more than the majority of people about the personality of the man. Of one thing my readers may be assured : I personally can vouch for the accuracy of every fact which I chronicle. You see I am not a professional historian.

How it happened that I am in a position to give hitherto unknown particulars about the Motor Pirate will appear in the course of my narrative. Sufficient for the moment let it be for me to say that it was purely by chance that the opportunity was thrown in my way; though, as it happened, it was not entirely without my own volition that I became involved in the network of events

which finally resulted in the tragedy which closed his career. By that tragedy the world lost a brilliant thinker and inventor, though unfortunately these great talents were accompanied by an abnormal condition of mind, which led the owner to utilise his invention in criminal pursuits.

It may probably seem strange that, being in possession of facts as to the identity of this mysterious person, I did not lay them before the police, who, at any time during the three months of his criminal career, would have given their ears to lay him by the heels. You may even think it is their duty to take proceedings against me as an accomplice. Well, I am quite prepared to answer any question which the police, or any one else for that matter, desires to put to me. James Sutgrove, of Sutgrove Hall, Norfolk, is not likely to change his address. When my poor old governor died he left me sufficient excuse, in the shape of real estate, for remaining in the country of my birth; though, if the necessity had arisen, I should not have hesitated about going abroad. At twenty-five, my age within a few weeks, a man has usually sufficient energy to enable him to carve out a career for himself in a new country, and I do not think I am very different to my fellows in that respect. But the fact is, I have nothing to fear from the police. My criminality was less than theirs. An ordinary citizen may be forgiven if he is blind to the meaning of things which occur under his nose, but the police are expected to be possessed of somewhat sharper vision. The utmost that can be urged

against me is, that if my eyes had been keener than those of Scotland Yard, reinforced by the trained vision of some hundreds of intelligent chief constables throughout the country, I might have been able to lay my hands upon the Motor Pirate before—but I must not anticipate my story.

One word of apology, however, before I begin. In order to make my narrative fully intelligible I shall have to refer to matters which may seem of a purely personal nature. I will make these as brief as possible, but it was entirely through such that I was brought into closer touch with the Motor Pirate than, perhaps with one exception, any other person in the world. If therefore I seem to be devoting too much attention to what appears to be merely personal interest, I trust I may be excused. To begin, then, at the beginning.

* * * * *

On the evening of March 31, 19—, I had arranged to dine in town with a couple of friends, both of them neighbours of mine. I am not going to mention the name of the restaurant. It was not one of the fashionable ones, or probably neither the cuisine nor the wines would have been so good as they were, though both would unquestionably have been more expensive. I prefer, therefore, to keep the name to myself. It was in the neighbourhood of Soho, however, and the reason I had invited my friends was in order to disabuse their minds of the idea that everything in that neighbourhood was of necessity cheap and nasty. I had determined

that their palates should be charmed by the dinner they were to eat, so, in addition to sending a note to the proprietor, I thought it as well to arrive at the restaurant a quarter of an hour before the appointed time, in order to make assurance doubly sure that everything was as I desired it. Had my guests been casual acquaintances, I must confess that I should never have taken this trouble. But they were not. One of them was the renowned Colonel Maitland. I never heard anything about his war service, but I do know that as a gastronomist his reputation is European. The cool way he will condemn an *entrée*, presented to him by an obsequious waiter, merely after casting a single glance upon it, speaks volumes for his critical insight; and as for wines—well, he can tell the vineyard and the vintage of a claret by the scent alone. I verily believe that were he to be served with a corked wine, the result would be instant dissolution between his gastronomic soul and body. Naturally I had to make some preparations, in order that such delicate susceptibilities should not be offended. In addition, I had a special reason for seeking to please him. Colonel Maitland had a daughter.

I have only to mention the name of my other guest to reveal his identity to every one with any knowledge of the motoring world. It was Fred Winter, *the* Fred Winter, leading light of the Automobile Club, holder of more road records than I can count, in fact the most enthusiastic motorist in the country. It was in consequence of this, indeed, that he came to be my guest.

There were few questions in regard to motoring upon which Winter was not competent to give an opinion, and being myself a victim to the prevailing motor-mania, I was deeply indebted to him for many valuable tips. By this time I had passed my novitiate, and was still driving a neat little 9½-h.p. Clément in order to fit myself for a more powerful and speedy car.

I arrived then at the restaurant about a quarter to eight, and having had a brief but satisfactory interview with the proprietor, I made my way to the table I had reserved in my favourite corner of the dining-room. Finding I had ten minutes to spare, to kill time I ordered a vermouth and the evening papers. The *Globe* was the first upon the pile the waiter brought to me, and following the example of most sane men, I skipped the parliamentary intelligence and turned to the "By the Way" column. I remember distinctly there was only one amusing paragraph therein, and I was about to throw the paper aside, with the customary lament as to the decadence of British humour, when my attention was arrested by a paragraph at the bottom of the next column. The heading was "Strange Highway Robbery." This was the paragraph :—

"Our Plymouth correspondent reports a novel highway robbery on the road between Tavistock and Plymouth. Two gentlemen who had been for a run on their motor to Tavistock, left the latter town about eight o'clock last night. Their journey was uneventful until they reached Roborough, where they were suddenly

overtaken by a motor-car occupied by a man, who presented a pistol at their heads, and ordered them to stop. Thinking that the stranger merely intended to scare them, and that the summons was only an ill-advised piece of pleasantry, they paid no attention to the demand; whereupon the driver of the strange car, with a well-directed shot, so damaged the machinery of their vehicle that they were compelled to obey. Their attacker then demanded all the money and articles of value they had in their possession under threat of completely wrecking their car, and after securing his booty the highwayman decamped. In consequence of the damage to their motor, it was not until late at night that they reached Plymouth, and were enabled to give particulars of the occurrence to the police. From their description of the stranger's vehicle, identification should not be difficult. It is a long, low, boat-shaped car of remarkable speed, and from the little noise it creates is probably driven by an electric motor. As to the personal appearance of the driver, the gentlemen who were robbed could form no opinion, for he wore the usual leather coat affected by tourists, and his head was completely enveloped in a hood."

On reading this paragraph, my first impulse was to lay aside the paper and indulge in a hearty laugh. My impression was that some wag had been hoaxing either the Plymouth correspondent or the London editor of the *Globe*. However, my curiosity was sufficiently aroused to lead me to take up another paper, to see if the *Globe* was the only paper which reported the occurrence.

The next paper on my pile was the *Star*, and the moment I unfolded the pink sheet, I perceived that this liveliest of evening journals was not going to be left behind by the *Globe* in providing the public with particulars of the latest sensation. Under the heading of "A Motor Pirate," with descriptive headlines extending across a couple of columns, and as attractively alliterative as the cunning pen of a smart sub-editor could make them, was the account of a similar incident. At first I thought it must be the same occurrence, but a brief perusal showed me that this impression was a wrong one. But I will give the *Star* account in full, and I do so the more readily, not only because it contains the first detailed account of the man whose extraordinary audacity was shortly to raise the interest of the public to fever pitch, but also because it tells the story with a force and colour of which my unpractised pen is incapable. Apologising therefore to the editor for the liberty I have taken, I reprint the *Star* account verbatim. I think, however, the story deserves a new chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE COMPTON CHAMBERLAIN OUTRAGE

"A MOTOR PIRATE

"TAKES TOLL OF TRAVELLERS IN THE WEST.

"A VEILED STRANGER ON A MYSTERIOUS MOTOR FLIES

"THE BLACK FLAG NEAR SALISBURY.

"ON receipt of the following extraordinary story from the Central News Agency this morning, the *Star* at once sent a representative to make inquiries on the spot. His inquiries reveal the existence of a new terror to all who travel by road. Following are the facts communicated to us by the agency :—

"'A daring highway robbery was committed near Salisbury late last night. The victims were two gentlemen who had been touring in the west country by motor. They had intended to reach Salisbury early yesterday evening, but were delayed by a puncture. When about eight miles from Salisbury they were attacked by the occupant of another car, who wrecked their vehicle, and, after robbing them of all their valuables, decamped, leaving them badly injured by the wayside. There they

were discovered some time afterwards and removed to the nearest inn at Compton Chamberlain, where they remain under medical attendance.—*Central News.*'

"The *Star* special correspondent wires :—

"Compton Chamberlain, 12.30.

"There is no doubt but that the Motor Pirate has a real existence. On arriving at Salisbury I at once proceeded to make inquiries as to what was known of the outrage, but Salisbury generally was sceptical on the subject. I found, however, that the affair had been reported at the county police office ; and I at once drove on here, and am now in a position to assert that this quiet Wiltshire village has been the scene of the most astounding robbery of modern times. It is safe to prophecy that in a few more months Dick Turpin will be forgotten. He has a rival in the field whose exploits will soon relegate him into comparative obscurity.

"The first visible evidence of the outrage was afforded me about a quarter of a mile from Compton. The road dips here slightly, and at the end of the incline a motor-car was drawn to the side of the road, or rather the remains of what had once been a smart Daimler of some 7 or 8 h.p. A stonebreaker was at work on an adjacent pile of flints, and when I alighted to examine the wreck, he hailed me with, 'Hoy, mister! Ye'd better leave thick thur car alone. The p'lice be comin' to tek un up zhortly.'

"I gathered from him that he had been told to keep

an eye upon the car, but beyond having heard that the owners had met with an accident, he knew nothing. There was no doubt about the accident. The car was so broken up that it looked as if it had been in collision with an armoured train.

"Compton Chamberlain, 2.45 p.m.

"I have just succeeded in interviewing the owner of the motor-car, a Mr. James Bradshaw, of 379, Maida Vale. His companion was Mr. Gainsborough Roberts, of 200, Clapham Common. Mr. Roberts is suffering from severe concussion, and has not regained consciousness; but fortunately Mr. Bradshaw's injuries, though painful, are not dangerous, and he has been good enough to give me a full account of his unique adventure. It seems the two gentlemen had been touring in the west country for ten days, and were on their way home. They stopped the previous night at Exeter, leaving about ten in the morning with the intention of reaching Salisbury about five or six yesterday evening. They lunched at Ilminster, and afterwards had traversed another twenty-five miles of their journey when one of their tyres unfortunately punctured. This was shortly after they had passed through Wincanton. When the tyre was mended, something went wrong with the electric ignition, and altogether the repairs proved such a tedious job that they could not make a fresh start until close upon lighting-up time.

"The delay had not troubled them, for the weather

was beautifully fine. As, however, they were very hungry, they determined to stop at Shaftesbury for dinner before finishing the day's run they had mapped out. There is a particularly long hill into Shaftesbury, and they did not reach that town until 8.30. At the hotel they met another party of motorists, and, agreeing to dine together, it was not until after ten that they found themselves once more on their way, with twenty miles of a hilly road to cover. The lateness of the hour did not trouble them much. They had wired to Salisbury for rooms; the night was fine and clear; a bright moon was shining; the roads were clear of traffic, and their motor was guaranteed to do its thirty-five miles an hour. They thought that it would be a good opportunity to find out what Mr. Bradshaw's car was really capable of doing on a hilly track.

"Mr. Bradshaw declares that he had never enjoyed a run more than he did on this occasion. A brisk wind was blowing behind them, they found there was more downhill than up, the road was absolutely clear, and they were able to take the declines at a pace which took the sting out of the ascents.

"So for twenty minutes they ran at full speed, and after slowing to pass through a village, they had just put on full speed again when Mr. Bradshaw's attention was arrested by a curious humming sound which appeared to arise from something behind. He was, of course, unable to glance back, as all his faculties were engaged in driving the car; but Mr. Roberts, whose attention was attracted

at the same moment, informed him that another motor-car was coming up behind. Then, to quote Mr. Bradshaw's own words, 'Thinking the other chap was on for a race, I did everything I knew to get every ounce out of my motor. But,' he continued, 'though I'll swear we were running nearer forty than thirty-five, the other fellow swooped up and passed us as if we were standing still.'

"For the moment he thought that the stranger was one of those American speed motors specially built for racing on the track, but only for a moment. The strange car slackening speed, allowed them to come alongside. What followed may be best described in Mr. Bradshaw's own words.

"'There was only one occupant of the strange car, and, seeing him slacken speed, I naturally thought he wished to speak to us. So, as he came level, I shouted to him, my exact words being, if I remember aright, "Hallo, sir! You've got a flyer there." I fancied I heard a chuckle from beneath his mask (he wore a hood covering the head fitted with a mica plate in front) and he replied, "Yes; I fancy my car is fast enough to overtake anything that is to be found on the road." There was something in his tone that struck me as peculiar, but I merely attributed it to the motorist's pride in his car. As however he said nothing further, but continued to keep alongside, in a manner that looked as if he were inclined to gloat over the owner of a less speedy machine, I asked with some little irritation, "Is

there anything I can do for you, because if not——" He did not allow me to finish my query. "Yes, sir," he replied promptly, "there is something I am going to ask you to do for me," and he gave another of his infernal chuckles.

"'"Well, what is it?" I demanded, with a little warmth.

"'"I must request you to hand over all your money and valuables to me," he replied.

"'I could not believe my ears. I was so astonished that I gave the wheel a turn that nearly landed us in the ditch. Will you believe it? Even in that swerve the strange car followed mine, and when I had got her straight in the road, I heard him chuckle again. His manner angered me beyond bearing.

"'"What the deuce do you mean?" I shouted.

"'"There's no need for you to lose your temper," he answered coolly. "I must, however, trouble you to stop that car at once."

"'As he spoke he raised his hand, and I saw the barrel of a revolver glisten in the moonlight. There seemed to be only one way out of the predicament, for I thought I had to deal with a madman, and I took it. I pretended to be so alarmed that I fell over the steering wheel, and made my car swerve again. But this time we swerved towards, instead of away from, the stranger. I doubt whether there was light enough for him to have read my intention in my face, but it was obvious that he anticipated my move, for his car shot forward with such

wonderful speed that the fate I intended to force upon him befell myself. I saw his car disappearing ahead, and the next moment I was just conscious of a shock that sent me flying into oblivion.

"'Exactly how long I remained unconscious I do not know, but when I came to my senses I found myself lying on the grass at the roadside, having fortunately been thrown on the soft turf. Roberts was lying unconscious on the road; the car was smashed to bits; our pockets had been turned inside out, and our money, watches, and every article of value we had about us, taken. Needless to say, the stranger had disappeared.'

"Mr. Bradshaw was not in a state to be of much assistance to his more badly injured friend, and he was at a complete loss as to what course to pursue, when a trap coming from Salisbury fortunately made its appearance on the scene. Assistance was procured, and the two injured gentlemen were conveyed to Compton, and medical attention quickly provided. Though much shaken, and badly bruised, Mr. Bradshaw has sustained comparatively little injury. Mr. Roberts, however, is dangerously ill, and his relatives have been telegraphed for.

"As regards the appearance of his assailant, Mr. Bradshaw can give few particulars, save that he was clad in a large leather motoring coat, and his face completely hidden by a mask. The car can, on the contrary, be easily identified. It is boat-shaped, running to a sharp, cutting edge both in front and behind. The body is not raised more than eighteen inches from the ground.

The wheels are either within the body, or so sheathed that they are completely hidden. It has apparently seating accommodation for two persons, the seat being placed immediately in the centre of the car. Mr. Bradshaw is quite convinced that petrol is not the motive force used for its propulsion, and as he cannot imagine that an electric motor of any kind was employed; the rapidity of motion, the perfection of the steering, the absence of noise and vibration, are so remarkable that he is utterly at a loss as to what build of car was driven by the stranger."

I had just finished reading this extraordinary story when I felt a tap on the shoulder, and, looking up, saw Colonel Maitland standing before me.

"'Pon my word, Sutgrove," he remarked, "I have never before seen any one so completely enthralled in a newspaper in my life. I've been standing watching you for nearly a minute."

I sprang to my feet, and held out my hand.

"What's the latest from Mr. Justice Jeune's division? When you come to my years of discretion you will be more interested in the *menu*."

I laughed. "It was not the inanities of the divorce court, Colonel," I remarked; "but the most astonishing——"

He checked me with uplifted hand. "Being a rational being," he said, "I prefer my stories with my cigar. One should come to dinner with a calm mind."

At this moment Winter entered the room, and, giving

a signal to the waiter, the *hors d'œuvre* were placed before us as he seated himself at the table.

When he had greeted me I had observed that Colonel Maitland's face had worn a slightly resigned expression that reminded me of a picture I had seen somewhere of Christian martyrs being led to the stake. He took a mouthful of caviar and the cloud lifted. After the soup the dominant note of self-sacrifice had vanished entirely. With the fish his features attained repose. When we reached the *entrée* his face had the radiance of a translated saint's. Then, with my mind at rest as to the effect of my little dinner upon my chief guest, I found time to devote a little attention to Winter. Yet, bearing in mind the Colonel's objection to anything but light generalities during the serious business of dinner, I forbore to introduce the topic I was burning to discuss with him. Not until the coffee was upon the table, and Colonel Maitland had expressed his contentment with the dinner, did I venture to refer to it. Then, while our senior was dallying with an early strawberry, Winter gave me a lead.

"By the way, Sutgrove," he said, "what's this I saw on the evening paper bills about a motor pirate?"

I told him. His interest was awakened to such an extent that he forgot to taste the glass of port which stood before him, and which I had ordered out of compliment to the Colonel's ideas of what was desirable.

When my story was concluded Winter was silent. Colonel Maitland, however, hazarded the remark that

the whole narrative was "a concoction of some of those newspaper fellows. I have been at the War Office," he said, "so I ought to know of what they are capable."

"I can scarcely imagine that any newspaper would dare hoax its readers to such an extent," remarked Winter.

"They are capable of anything—anything," replied the Colonel, vigorously. "I have known them on more than one occasion to attack even my department."

"That of course is scandalous," I replied warmly; "but here the conditions are different. They are referring to people who are able to reply if the facts are not as stated. In your case your mouth, of course, was closed."

"Umph!" growled the Colonel.

"At the same time," said Winter, "it may very well have happened that consciously or unconsciously the papers have been made the victims of a practical joke. To-morrow is the first of April, remember. Or even apart from the joke theory, the event happened after dinner, and Mr. Bradshaw may have found it necessary to be prepared with an explanation of his accident."

"But the robbery?" I objected.

"A passing tramp may have thought the opportunity too good to be neglected."

"At all events," I persisted, "it is curious that two similar accidents should have occurred the same night in the same part of the country."

"Certainly the coincidence is remarkable," answered Winter. "But do not forget that the two occurrences

took place at least a hundred and thirty miles apart within less than three hours of one another. I will swear that no motor yet built would cover those roads inside three hours. I know them. No, Sutgrove. The moral seems to me to be that it is unwise for a motorman to look upon the wine when it is red, if he wants to get anywhere afterwards."

The Colonel stretched his hand across the table and removed the glass which stood on the table before Winter.

"My young friend," he observed, "you have, I believe, undertaken to bring me safely home to-night?"

"You need not fear," replied Winter, laughing, "it's only the liquors supplied at country inns which drive motor-cars into ditches."

The Colonel replaced the glass with a smile and refilled his own from the cradled bottle at his elbow.

"I am merely a passenger, but you drive," he remarked. "I think, Sutgrove, under the circumstances, I will be responsible for the remainder of this bottle. It is endowed with certain qualities which particularly recommend themselves to me. It would be a sad thing if an accident were to befall us on our journey. In times of stress such as these one never knows when the War Office may not require the services of a capable man."

Though the Colonel spoke in jest, in the event his words indicated with a fair amount of accuracy the destination of the port, for while we continued to discuss every point in the story, he sipped and sipped and nodded

his head beatifically. I did not replenish my glass, but when we rose the bottle was empty.

"Well, Colonel, what do you say to a music hall?" I asked.

"My boy," he replied, as he patted me on the back, "I sleep far more comfortably in my bed."

I realized where the contents of the bottle had gone by the sententiousness of my friend's phrasing, the slight turgidity, so to speak, of his articulation.

"My dear boy," he continued, "I have never known you until this moment. You are greater than Columbus. Any one might discover a new continent, but in these days it needs exceptional qualities of enterprise and endurance to discover a fresh restaurant. I am content. Let us go home."

We donned our overcoats and came into the open air. Winter's motor was waiting at the door in charge of a man from the *garage* where he had left it. We stepped in.

CHAPTER III

WHEREIN I MEET THE PIRATE

We were soon out of the narrow Soho street, and I observed that the time was just half-past ten as Winter steered us carefully through Piccadilly Circus. Colonel Maitland occupied a seat behind while I sat beside Winter.

The car my friend drove was a magnificent 22-horse Daimler, built to his own specification and capable of doing considerably more than any car I had hitherto been privileged to ride upon. Of course while passing through the streets there was little chance of exhibiting its capabilities. Yet even there, the way the car glided in and out of the traffic, delicately responsive to the slightest touch of the steering wheel, was sufficient evidence of its quality to set the most nervous passenger at ease. As it was as yet too early for the after theatre traffic to fill the streets and compel us to stop every few minutes, we followed the main road up Oxford Street as far as the Marble Arch. There we turned to the right. Once clear of the narrow part of the Edgeware Road, Winter put on his second speed and a very few minutes seemed

to have passed before we were bumping over a rough bit of roadway by Cricklewood.

"There's not much of this," said Winter, cheerily over his shoulder to the Colonel.

Our gastronomic friend merely grunted for reply, and I should have thought him to be asleep had not the red glow of his cigar assured me that he was still awake.

Winter jammed on his third speed and the hedges began to fly past us. We were in the country now and were able to appreciate the fineness of the night. Indeed it was a perfect night. The air was sharp but without sting. The moon shone with a clear brilliance which betokened rain in the near future. The road was clean and dry, and there was no dust in the air except the thin cloud which floated behind us. We passed the Welsh Harp without a check, and not until we reached Edgeware did Winter revert to his second speed. We ran through the little town with only momentary slackening of pace, and so we sped onwards until we opened the stretch of road leading to Brockley Hill. Here Winter, seeing the road clear ahead, jammed on his highest speed and the wheels droned like a hive of bees as we darted towards the incline. We were half way up the hill before Winter found it necessary to transform his speed into power, and we finished the ascent with ease. Then once more the order was third speed, and we whirled away through Elstree and passed through Radlett a bare half hour from the time we started.

Just at this time I looked back to see how Colonel

Maitland fared. His cigar no longer glowed, though it was still tightly held between his teeth. His head was bent forward, and the regular and gentle murmur which came from his nose proclaimed that he slept. I had just mentioned the fact to Winter, and had turned again to assure myself that he was comfortably wrapped in his rug, when I thought I saw on the road behind me another car.

"Hullo!" I said to Winter. "There's another chap coming on behind us. Without lights, too!"

A slight bend in the road shut out the view, however, and made me doubt whether or no my eyes had been deceiving me.

"Pooh!" replied Winter. "We've passed nothing on the road, and at the pace we've been travelling there's not another car owned in this district we should not have left miles behind us, even if it had started at the same time as ourselves. You must have mistaken some of the shadows from the trees. How much of that port did you drink?"

I laughed, but as we had now reached a straight stretch of road I looked back again.

"I'm right," I said. "There is another car, and by jove! It's coming up hand over fist."

"What?" shouted Winter. "What?"

He clearly did not appreciate the idea of being overtaken by any one, for he whipped on his highest speed and jammed down the accelerator. The change was enormous. Our powerful car, relieved from all restraint,

simply leaped through the air. Winter gave a pleased laugh as he steadied her with the wheel.

"If the stranger can catch us now I shall believe it's the Motor Pirate himself," he remarked in a pleased tone, that showed how proud he was of his own car.

Our progress was so exhilarating that I wanted to shout defiance to the stranger; yet I was so fascinated with the pace we were travelling, that I could not take my eyes from the road which uncoiled before us.

Suddenly a humming sound forced itself upon my ear. For a moment I thought it was due to the whirr of our own wheels. Then it struck me that the note was a higher one. I half turned. The other car was within a yard or two of us. In another second it was level and, running without any visible vibration, indeed, without any noise save the snore of the wheels as they raced round, the stranger slackened speed and ran by our side.

Winter cast a hasty glance at the strange car, and I saw him bite his lip with annoyance at finding his Daimler so outpaced.

One glance at the stranger was enough to tell me with whom we had to deal. In the brilliant moonlight, the boat-shaped car with its sharp prow, the almost invisible wheels, the masked occupant, assured me that the evening papers has not been the victims of a hoax.

"It's the Motor Pirate himself," I said to Winter, and my voice was hoarse with excitement.

"Motor Pirate be d——d!" replied Winter. What more he would have said I do not know, for at this moment the stranger turning his mask towards us called out in the most urbane manner—

"I must trouble you gentlemen to stop that car."

Winter at the best of times is of rather a peppery disposition, and whenever any one requires him to pull up, his temper invariably gets the better of his manners. His reply was an unnecessarily verbose, and needlessly forcible negative.

I heard the stranger chuckle. "I really must trouble you to obey my wishes," he replied, with ironic courtesy. "Otherwise I shall be compelled to do some damage to that car of yours, a proceeding I always try to avoid if possible."

"Do what you please," was in effect Winter's luridly adjectived answer.

"If you do not pull up within thirty seconds your fate will be upon your own heads," said the stranger, shortly, as he laid his hand upon a lever.

His car leapt away from ours, and though we were running nearly sixty miles an hour, we might have been standing still, he dropped us so rapidly. In fifteen seconds he had vanished in a cloud of dust ahead.

"I'm going to stop," said Winter, abruptly. He suited the action to the word, and none too soon.

Again we heard the curious drone of the strange car as it swooped down upon us, coming to a sudden halt a yard distant, with really beautiful precision.

"What do you want?" shouted Winter, in his gruffest tones.

"I'm glad to find you have had the wisdom to do as I desired you," said the Motor Pirate; for it was indeed he with whom we were now face to face. "It would have deeply grieved me to wreck so good a car as that you have there. A Daimler, I believe?"

"Oh, d——n your compliments! What is it you want?" growled Winter.

"Merely any articles of jewellery and any money you may happen to have about you," remarked the stranger, pleasantly.

I saw the moonlight glitter on the barrel of a revolver as he spoke, and he now lifted the weapon and pointed it towards us.

"I do not wish to proceed to extremities, and, as I gather from your speech that I am dealing with gentlemen"—really Winter's language had fully warranted the sarcasm—"if you will give me your word of honour that you will hand over to me all articles of value in your possession, I will leave your car untouched. If, on the contrary, you decline to oblige me, I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of ruining that very handsome car you are driving. I do not like to hurry you, but I am afraid I must ask you to come to a speedy decision on the matter, for these roads in the vicinity of London are not quite so secluded as one of my profession could wish."

He delivered this speech with an air of mock

politeness, which made Winter writhe. He did not, however, reply. I think he was too angry.

"Come, gentlemen! Make up your minds. Your money or your—car!"

He made a slight pause before he said the word "car," and his fingers played with the revolver in a manner that sent a cold shiver down my spine.

"It's his turn now," I whispered to Winter. "It may be ours presently."

"Come, come, gentlemen!" said the stranger again; "do you give me your words?"

"D——n you! I suppose we must," jerked out Winter, almost inarticulate with rage.

"Each of you will dismount in turn and lay the contents of your pockets before me here." He indicated a level shelf, which formed apparently part of the casing of one of the wheels. "I must insist upon seeing the linings of your pockets; and I need hardly warn you that it will be extremely undesirable for you to make any movement liable to misconstruction. This toy"—he lifted his pistol—"has a very delicate touch. Now, gentlemen. One at a time, please, and do not wait to discuss the question of precedence. I am quite willing to overlook any little informality."

I listened closely to his speech, but the voice was so muffled by the mask he wore, that I felt I should be unable to recognize it again. Only one point I was assured upon—that the Pirate was an educated man.

Meanwhile what were we to do? All sorts of wild

plans were darting through my brain, and I knew that Winter's mind must be equally active. But out of the medley no coherent scheme took shape. Winter dismounted, and, throwing off his overcoat, advanced into the brilliant circle of light cast by our lamps, and proceeded to empty his pockets. He laid his note-case, his watch and chain, and sovereign-purse upon the car in front of the highwayman, and, in obedience to a further command, added the diamond which shone upon his little finger, and another which adorned his shirt-front, to the pile. Then he resumed his place in the car, and I passed through a similar humiliating ordeal. All the while the stranger kept up a flow of apologies for the inconvenience which his necessities compelled him to occasion us. I kept silence, though I must confess the effort was a considerable strain upon my temper. Still, a pistol with a business man at the butt end of it, is of considerable assistance in preventing the exhibition of annoyance.

"If the other gentleman will make haste, I shall be the sooner able to relieve you of my unwelcome society," the Pirate remarked, as I returned to our car after handing over all the valuables in my possession.

In the excitement, I had, until this moment, entirely forgotten the presence of Colonel Maitland; and now, looking closely at him, I discovered that he was still in happy ignorance of the *contretemps* which had befallen us. Swathed in rugs, he was propped up on the seat behind us slumbering peacefully. A smile was upon his

rosy face, and ever and again he smacked his lips. He must have been dreaming of a finer vintage than ever terrestrial vineyard produced.

"What the deuce can we do?" I asked Winter.

"Hullo, Colonel!" shouted my friend.

"What's the matter?" inquired the Pirate. "Does your friend refuse to acknowledge the compact?"

"I'm afraid he can hardly be said to be a party to it," I replied. "He has dined, and now he sleeps."

"Well, you will awaken him less roughly than I shall," was the retort.

"Any one who knows Colonel Maitland is aware that he is exceedingly annoyed if awakened from his after-dinner nap," I urged.

"Colonel Maitland? Colonel Maitland the gourmet?"

"You know him?" said Winter.

The Pirate laughed pleasantly. "I have met him on one occasion, and, as some slight return for a very excellent dinner which he ordered, and for which—doubtless by an oversight—he left me to pay, I will not trouble you to awaken him on this occasion. I wish you good evening, gentlemen."

As he finished speaking he backed his car for a few yards. His hand moved to a lever. The car turned. He waved the hand which was disengaged, and in a moment he was gone, attaining at once a speed, which, until then I had thought it impossible for a motor-car ever to achieve.

Both Winter and I sat stock still, gazing after the fast disappearing car. We could not watch it for long; as in fifteen seconds it was out of sight, and even the dust-cloud it had raised in its progress had cleared.

Then Winter turned to me and muttered a few expletives gently in my ear. I followed his example and we both felt better, at least I think so; for, without rhyme or reason, Winter burst into a fit of laughter, and I followed his example, though I cannot explain now, any more than I could have done then, why I laughed.

When we had done laughing, Winter turned to me and said—

"Sutgrove, old fellow, would you mind punching me? I'm not quite sure whether it is the Colonel who is asleep or myself. I feel as if I have just awakened from dreaming of the story those newspapers printed."

"It's not much of a dream," I remarked. "I little thought that we were to have the good fortune of so early an introduction to the Motor Pirate, however. The Colonel will be quite cross to think that his bottle of port prevented the renewal of an old acquaintance."

Then Winter laughed again. I think he saw the amusing side of our adventure more clearly than I did, for I said sharply—

"Hadn't we better be getting on to St. Albans, and giving information to the police?"

"H—m—m!" he answered meditatively. "I think perhaps we had better not."

"Not?" I replied in surprise.

"In the first place it is after dinner," he said.

"What of that? We dined wisely."

"One of us knows nothing about it." Winter jerked his thumb in the direction of the slumbering warrior. "We could hardly explain the reason why the Colonel slept so soundly through the adventure. The explanation could hardly please him, would it?"

I muttered an assent.

"Besides," continued Winter, "for three of us to admit that we tamely allowed ourselves to be held up by one man, and forced to hand over to him all our valuables, well it—er—it hardly seems heroic, does it? That wouldn't create a very favourable impression upon Miss Maitland either."

I was compelled to agree with him.

"I think perhaps we had best keep the matter to ourselves. I have no desire to provide another sensation for the evening papers to-morrow."

"At any rate I'm not going to sit down quietly under my loss if you are," I responded irritably.

"That's another matter altogether," replied Winter, as he set our car in motion once more. "I did not say that I was going to grin and bear it either."

"What do you propose?" I cried eagerly.

"That is a question we will discuss over a whisky and soda, when we have deposited the Colonel safely at home;" and he refused to say anything further.

Our car was once more put at full speed, and in five

minutes we reached the cross-roads on the outskirts of St. Albans, where the road to Watford makes a junction with that on which we had come from town. Here Winter pulled up, and, much to my surprise, dismounted and made a careful examination of the road by the light of our lamps.

"I just want to see in which direction the fellow went," he answered, in reply to my inquiry as to the meaning of his action.

He was still engaged on the task when we heard in the distance the regular beat of a petrol motor approaching us on the Watford road.

"If it's another pirate, he won't get much plunder," I remarked.

"That's no pirate," replied Winter, as a couple of lights came into view. "Cannot you recognize the rattle of Mannering's old car? I should know it anywhere. He will be able to tell us if any one has passed him on the road."

As soon as the new-comer came within range of his voice, Winter hailed him.

"That you, Mannering?"

"Hullo, Winter! Got a puncture? Can I be of any assistance?"

Was it indeed Mannering's voice, or were my ears deceiving me? The intonation was remarkably like that of the stranger, who so short a time previously had bade us stand and deliver, that I sprang to my feet with an exclamation of astonishment. My eyes at once

convinced me that my ears had played me false. There was no mistaking Mannering's lumbering old car for the graceful shape of the Motor Pirate's vehicle. I resumed my seat, taking my nerves seriously to task for generating the suspicion, if suspicion it could be called, which had flashed across my mind. If anything further had been needed to dispel it, the reply vouchsafed to Winter's query as to whether he had met any one on the road would have done so.

"Met any one?" said Mannering; "I should think I have. Met the most wonderful motor I've ever seen, about a couple of miles back. 'Pon my soul, I'm not sure even now whether it was not a big night bird, for it just swooped by me with about as much noise as a humming-top might make. It must have been travelling eighty miles an hour at least. Reckless sort of devil the driver must be too. He hadn't a single light. I suppose his lamps must have been put out by the rapidity with which he was travelling. Never had such a scare in my life. I'd like to meet the Johnny. I'd welcome an opportunity of telling him what I thought of his conduct."

"So should I," replied Winter, grimly; "and I fancy Sutgrove would not be averse to a meeting with him."

"Why, what has he been doing?" asked Mannering.

"It's too long a story to tell you now," said Winter, as he climbed back into his seat; "but if you will come up to my place as soon as you have put your car to bed, I'll tell you all about it."

"Right!" sang out Mannering, as we once more

set out upon our homeward way. We had not much further to go. In two minutes we had pulled up at Colonel Maitland's door.

I leaned back and shouted, "Here we are, Colonel," in the slumbering warrior's ear.

"Eh! What—what?" he replied, as he awakened with a start. "When are we going to start?"

"Start? Why we've brought you safely home to your own threshold," said Winter.

"'Pon my soul! I remember now," he answered. "I just shut my eyes to keep the dust out of 'em, and—— You will come in for a peg, of course," he continued, as he emerged from the rugs in which he had been enveloped.

I glanced at the windows. There was only a light in the Colonel's study. If there had been another in the drawing-room, I should have accepted forthwith. As it was, I merely said that I could not think of disturbing Miss Maitland.

"Pooh!" said the Colonel, with the usual callous disregard of the mere father for his children's beauty sleep.

But he did not press the invitation. Indeed it was with difficulty he succeeded in repressing a yawn.

"I'll call to-morrow, and get a considered opinion upon my Soho house of entertainment," I remarked, as the Colonel opened his door, and paused at the entrance to bid us a final good night.

"Glad to see you," he replied, as he grasped my

hand and shook it warmly. "But of one thing you may rest assured. So long as that bin of port holds out, your house of entertainment may count upon me as a regular customer whenever I dine in town."

"Opium isn't in it," commented Winter in a low voice, as he set the car in motion and wheeled out of the drive. "How he could have slept so soundly through it all absolutely beats me."

I did not reply. My attention was concentrated upon one of the upper windows, at which I thought I had seen a form I knew very well make a brief appearance. But we left the window and house behind us. Winter's place was only about a hundred yards further up the road.

CHAPTER IV

CONCERNING MY RIVAL

"Now, Jim, dip your beak into that, and let me see if it will not restore to your classic features their customary repose."

So saying, Winter handed me a stately tumbler, and the mixture was so much to my liking that I felt an involuntary relaxation of my facial muscles immediately I obeyed the command. I stretched myself at length in the easy chair which I had drawn up before the fire, and felt able to forgive even the Motor Pirate. We were alone in the apartment which Winter called his study, but since the only books he read therein were motor-catalogues, and the lounges with which the snuggery was furnished were much more conducive to repose than to mental exertion, I refused to acknowledge its claim to the title. That, by the way. The fire was burning brightly. Winter's red, rugged, honest face was beaming with almost equal radiance. Who could help feeling happy?

Then Mannering was announced, and Mannering was a man I had learned to passively dislike. Why, I scarcely

knew. I was aware of nothing against him. Indeed, when six months previously, on my first coming to St. Albans, I had been introduced to him, I had been rather favourably impressed. He was a tall dark man of thirty-five, with more than the average endowment of good looks. He could tell a good story, had shot big game in most parts of the world, was well-read, intelligent, possessed unexceptionable manners, and yet—— Well, Winter had none of his various qualifications, but I would at any time far rather have had one friend like Winter than a hundred like the other man.

I had first made his acquaintance at Colonel Maitland's house, where I had found him on an apparently intimate footing. Perhaps it was this very intimacy which formed the basis for my dislike, for—there is no need to mince matters—at this time I was jealous, horribly and unreasonably jealous, of every male person who entered the Colonel's house. And here, perhaps, it will be better for me to explain how it happened that I came to be living in a cottage on the outskirts of St. Albans in preference to my own house in Norfolk.

The change in my residence had been entirely due to a tennis party at Cromer. There I met Evie Maitland. She was—— No, every one can fill in the blank from their own experience for themselves; and if they cannot, I pity them.

Fortunately I had an aunt present. She was the most amiable of aunts, and quite devoted towards her most dutiful nephew. With her assistance, I managed not

only to improve my acquaintance with Miss Maitland, but also to effect an introduction to her father. I had only known them a week, however, before the Colonel took his daughter back to St. Albans. I allowed an interval of a fortnight to elapse, and then I followed. Of course I had to be prepared with some excuse, and here luck favoured me. Looking through the directory I discovered that Winter, whom I knew slightly as having been up at Camford about the same time as myself, was also a resident in the delightful St. Alban's suburb of St. Stephens where the Maitlands resided. I sought out Winter. I confided my story to him. The upshot of it all was that I took a cottage close to his house, and not far from the Colonel's, ostensibly that under Winter's tuition I might develop into a first-class motorist.

Somehow I found that I made a great deal more progress with my motoring than with my love-making. Surely a more bewitching, tantalizing, provoking little beauty than Evie Maitland never tore a man's heart to fragments. If she was kind to me one day, she would be still kinder to Mannering the next. But that is neither here nor there. Anyhow, I heartily wished him out of the way, for there was no doubt whatever that Randolph Mannering was a much more attractive person than my insignificant self. His mere advantage in age counted for something; but I could have forgiven him that, had he not made use of the years to see so much and do so much, that he could not help appearing in the light of a hero to a girl who was just at the worshipping age.

And he knew so well how to get the fullest value out of his experiences. He never paraded them, I must admit that much in his favour. He was far too clever. An anecdote here and there to illustrate some point in the conversation, a modest account of some thrilling adventure, in which he hardly ever mentioned the part he had personally played, produced a much greater effect than if he had gone about trumpeting the deeds he had done and the dangers he had survived.

He had, too, the advantage of a much longer acquaintance with the Maitlands than myself. I learned from the Colonel that Mannering had been living in a house whose garden adjoined his own for a year before my arrival on the scene. His life, until the Colonel had recognized him as an acquaintance he had made at the house of a friend some years before, had been that of a recluse, the object of his retirement being to perfect some mechanical invention upon which he was engaged. He had soon developed into a friend of the family, and I had found him firmly installed as such when I made my appearance at St. Albans.

Naturally then I was none too pleased that Winter had proposed to take him into our confidence, but I made no absolute objection.

I sat smoking quietly while Winter told the story of our adventure. He listened most attentively.

"It's a most extraordinary story," he remarked, when the narrative was concluded. "You are quite sure neither of you touched any of that port?"

Winter turned one of his pockets inside out with an expressive gesture.

"Wine may rob a man of his wits," he replied, "but it does not relieve him of fifty pounds in notes, six in gold, a watch and chain worth fifty, and a diamond which has been valued at a hundred."

"The numbers of the notes should enable you to trace the thief," said Mannering, thoughtfully.

Winter laughed. "The fact is, I am such a careless beggar. I always carry notes about with me, replenishing my case when necessary; and really I have nothing to tell me whether those notes I had in my possession were the last batch I had from the bank, or odd ones left over from previous consignments. They may have been in my case for months."

"Both Winter and I could identify our watches," I hazarded.

"Of course," replied Mannering, "if your Motor Pirate is fool enough to attempt to pawn them you may get the chance; but if he sells them to a receiver, they'll go straight into the melting pot."

Winter lit a cigarette and Mannering turned to me. "What was the extent of your loss?"

"Ten in gold, thirty in notes, and say thirty for my watch. My loss is comparatively light."

"You know the numbers of your notes, I suppose?" he inquired, as he lit a cigarette in turn.

"Yes," I replied, "I'm not quite so casual as Winter."

"There's some clue for the police to work upon, then."

"It might prove to be so, only Winter thinks we show up so badly in the whole affair that he won't hear of my giving information."

"The fact is," said Winter, "Maitland slept soundly through the whole affair, and it wouldn't be sporting to give him away."

"I see——" began Mannering.

Winter deftly changed the subject. "What puzzles me," he said, "is the kind of motor the fellow employed to propel his car. I know of nothing at present on the market anything like so effective. I've seen 'em all."

"Your loss doesn't seem to trouble you much, anyhow," commented Mannering.

"I would willingly give a hundred times as much for a duplicate of that motor. I should be pretty sure to get my money back once I put it on the market."

"If there's all that value in it, why should the owner go in for highway robbery?" I asked.

"That's just what I fail to understand," said Winter. "From what I could see of it, our friend the Motor Pirate is possessed of an ideal car, graceful in shape, making no noise, running with a minimum of vibration and a maximum of speed. Why, there's a fortune in it."

"Of course it is quite impossible that the motive power can be electricity?" remarked Mannering, gazing into the fire as if he could see a solution of the mystery therein.

"Quite out of the question. Any one who has the slightest knowledge of motoring would know it to be impossible, even if the Pirate had devised a storage battery which would knock Edison's latest invention into a cocked hat. But supposing he had achieved the feat, remember that, according to the newspaper reports, he was at Plymouth yesterday at dusk, near Salisbury at eleven the same evening, and holding us up on the confines of St. Albans to night. He would be bound to get his batteries recharged somewhere and, with a car of such remarkable shape, how is he to do so without exciting remark? No; electricity is quite out of the question. I should be glad to think that the car was an electric one. His capture would only be a matter of a few hours."

An indefinable expression, which might have been a smile, flitted across Mannering's face.

"I hope, for all our sakes, his motor is an electric one," he said. "At all events it should not be difficult to track a car of so singular a shape. If it were built on the same lines as yours or mine, for instance, the owner might go anywhere without attracting attention."

"Anyhow," I broke in, "until he is captured I'm going for a run every night with something that will shoot within easy reach. The next time I have the fortune to meet with him I hope I shall be in a position to get a bit of my own back."

Again a smile appeared on Mannering's face as he exclaimed, "I almost feel inclined to follow your example.

I have nearly forgotten how to use a pistol since I have resided in this law-ridden land."

"Surely you won't expose your experimental car to the chance of being rammed by the Motor Pirate," remarked Winter, chaffingly.

Mannering's car was a stock joke with us. It was a particularly cumbersome vehicle, with heaven only knows what type of body. It might have been capable of twenty miles an hour on the flat, but that would be the extreme limit of its powers. "You fellows," he had explained to us one day, "have taken to motoring for the fun of flying along the high-roads at an illegal speed. I have taken to it for a more utilitarian purpose. I have my own ideas about the motor of the future, and I am working them out down here. My old caravan is heavy, perhaps, but I want a heavy car. It's most useful for testing tyres, and that is one of the special points engaging my attention. Besides, in this car I am not tempted to get into trouble with the police. Twelve miles an hour is quite fast enough for all my purposes."

Both Winter and myself had frequently asked him how he was progressing with his work, but as he had never returned us any but the vaguest of answers, nor ever invited us into the workshop which had once formed the stables of the house where he resided, we had thought that his story of being engaged in mechanical invention merely an excuse for getting rid of unpleasant visitors. I think we were both surprised when he answered Winter's chaff quite warmly.

"I should not at all mind exposing my car to any risk if I could get the opportunity to examine the Motor Pirate's car. If the truth must be told, from what I have seen of his car, and what you have told me, I am rather inclined to think that whoever designed it has forestalled me in an idea which I had thought quite my own. I have long been working to produce a car which would run at least a hundred miles an hour without noise or perceptible vibration."

"Couldn't you get it completed in a week?" interrupted Winter. "We might have a most exciting chase after our friend."

Mannering shook his head. "I've been absolutely floored on one detail, and if that fellow has solved the problem——" Shrugging his shoulders, he rose and held out his hand to Winter. I followed his example.

"I had no idea that you had anything so important on the stocks," remarked Winter, as he accompanied us to the door.

"Nor would you have done so until you saw the perfect machine on the road, if it had not been for my chagrin at seeing that car to-night. Of course I can count upon you both to say nothing of the matter."

"On condition that you do not refer to our adventure again," said I, laughing.

"Agreed," responded Mannering, as he smiled again.

We both said good night to Winter, and in spite of our host's efforts to persuade us to stay for another peg, I

followed Mannering out, declaring that I should never be able to face Mrs. Winter again if I kept him up any longer.

I found Mannering standing at the gate, and I paused beside him to glance at the sky, across which one or two fleecy clouds were hurrying from the west. The moon, brilliant as earlier in the evening, now hung low down over the horizon. The breeze had freshened, and we could hear it whispering amongst the trees.

"We shall not be long without rain. If the Pirate is still abroad he will leave tracks," said Mannering.

The beauty of the night held so much of appeal to me that I felt annoyed at the current of my thoughts being turned back to the topic.

I answered shortly. My companion took no notice of my petulance.

"You have always thought I cared nothing for speed," he remarked, "but you were mistaken. I thought I would keep my desires in the background until I had succeeded in perfecting a car which I knew it would be impossible to outpace. I could not enter into competition with longer purses than my own, and if I had bought the fastest car in the market somebody else would have bought one faster. But to-night—— By Jove! How I envy that Motor Pirate. Imagine what the possession of that car means on a night like this, with the roads clear from John-o'-Groat's to Land's End. Fancy flying onwards at a speed none have ever attempted. Can you not see the road unwinding before you like a reel of

white ribbon, hear the sweet musical drone of the wheels in your ears——" He stopped abruptly.

He must have observed my natural amazement at the intensity of feeling which his speech displayed, for he observed in a lighter tone—

"Not being Motor Pirates, however, the next best thing is, I suppose, to go to bed and dream that we are." He turned on his heel and strode away in one direction, while I went in the direction of my own home. But I was in no hurry to get there. The night was too delightful.

In the few hours which had elapsed since we had sat down to dine, a change had come over the face of the land. I could feel the presence of Spring in the air, and all the youth in me awoke. The creatures of the earth felt it too. In the silence of the night I could hear the crackle of the buds as they cast off their winter coverings, hear the whisper of the grass, which the countryman declares is the sound of growing blades, hear the murmur of all animate things as they rose to welcome the Spring-tide. My own heart leapt up with a renewal of hope. I stood awhile outside Colonel Maitland's door, and breathed a prayer that it might be my fortune to protect the fair inmate of the house from all harm through life. I strolled slowly to my own door, but I did not enter. Moonbeams beget love-dreams when one is still in the twenties.

Back again to the Colonel's house, back once more to my own. In all probability I should have continued

my solitary sentry-go and my reverie until daybreak, had not my thoughts been sharply recalled to earth. On reaching my own doorway for the fifth or sixth time I had just turned, when I saw a black shadow on the road opposite the Maitlands' house. One glance was enough; it was the Motor Pirate again, and I began to count. "One—two—," the car passed me, "three—four;" it had vanished round a turning of the road in the direction of St. Albans.

Even what I had already experienced of the Pirate had not prepared me for such an exhibition as this. What Mannering had said about the delight of flying along an open road at a hundred miles an hour recurred to me. I had not deemed it possible. But I paced the distance between the Colonel's house and the bend where the strange car had passed out of sight. The distance was just about two hundred yards, and it had been covered as near as possible in four seconds. The car must have been travelling just about a hundred miles an hour.

I went straight indoors to bed. I am not ashamed to confess that I was not able to continue my dreams in comfort, while pacing the road, by the consideration of what would have happened to me had the Motor Pirate come along just two seconds before I happened to turn and see him.

CHAPTER V

THE COLONEL DREAMS, AND I AWAKEN

I SLEPT until late the next morning. I have always been accustomed to a clear eight hours' sleep, and, as I did not get between the sheets until about four in the morning, I naturally did not awaken until mid-day. So what with my tub and the necessity for shaving, my early morning call upon the Colonel did not come off. I suppose, as a matter of fact, I sat down to breakfast just about the time when the gastronomic warrior was thinking of luncheon. However, when I saw how amply my expectation of a change in the weather had been fulfilled, I did not regret my lengthy sleep. From a sodden grey sky sheets of water were steadily pouring. There was not the slightest chance of any break in the clouds. Consequently I felt assured of finding Miss Maitland at home if I made my call in the afternoon, and since her father oftentimes thought it expedient to take a little repose after luncheon in order to prepare himself for the fatigue of dining, it was possible that I might even be fortunate enough to secure a *tête-à-tête* with her.

I came to my breakfast, therefore, with as good a spirit as appetite, neither being in the slightest degree affected by the memory of the easy way in which I had been plundered by the Motor Pirate. Of course I felt a certain chagrin. Still, I could contemplate the adventure with a considerable deal more equanimity than I had managed to display the night before, though I found that my curiosity concerning him had, if anything, increased. I turned with eagerness to the morning papers to see whether they could add to my knowledge concerning him.

As every one is aware, all the papers on the morning of the first of April that year devoted columns to his exploits. If I remember aright, the country was at that time engaged upon two of our usual minor wars, Parliament was in the midst of an important debate upon the second reading of a measure to secure an extension of the franchise, and a divorce case of more than common interest was engaging the attention of the leading legal lights of the law courts. But all these things received but the scantiest notice. The war news was relegated to the inside pages, the Parliamentary intelligence cut down to the barest summary, the *cause célèbre* dismissed with such a paragraph as ordinarily serves to chronicle an unimportant police court case. The Motor Pirate had nearly a monopoly of the space at the editorial disposal. There was column after column about him. The Plymouth robbery was reported in as great detail as the Compton Chamberlain affair, while there were particulars

of two similar outrages committed at points between these two places.

On running my eye over the reports I saw that they added nothing to what I already knew, and I wasted no time in reading the leaders on the subject. I was, however, extremely interested to find from one paper that Winter and I had not been the only victims of the scoundrel's rapacity on the previous evening, for a brief telegram reported a similar occurrence a few miles from Oxford on the London road. I at once sent my man to purchase any of the early editions of the evening papers which might have reached St. Albans, in the hope that they might contain further particulars of these operations.

I had finished my breakfast, and was enjoying a cigarette in my library, when he returned. I took the papers from him, and the first glance at one of them made me gasp with amazement. The news which startled me was all in one line—"Five more cars held up by the Motor Pirate."

I am not going into details concerning these. If you have a desire to refresh your memory all you have to do is to turn to any newspaper of the date I have named and you will be able to get them *ad nauseam*. But I will venture to give a list of the places where and the times at which the outrages took place, for I made a list of them in the hope that, by carefully studying it with the map, I might get some idea as to where he might next be expected to make his appearance.

I found that at five minutes past nine he stopped a car some four miles from Oxford. Twenty minutes later he was robbing a lonely motorist midway between Thame and Aylesbury. Then for forty minutes he appeared to have been idle, his next two exploits taking place within five minutes of each other, just after ten, in the neighbourhood of Amersham. King's Langley was the scene of his next adventure, the time given being about a quarter of an hour before he had overtaken us. In addition to the particulars of these robberies there were a host of reports from people who had seen the Pirate car pass them on the road. But there was one notable omission from the latter list. Not from a single town was there any record of the Pirate having been seen passing through it.

I got a map of the district, and, after studying the country carefully, I was fain to confess that one of two things was certain : either the Motor Pirate had the power to make his car invisible at will, or else he had a truly phenomenal knowledge of the bye-roads. How he had even managed to get to Oxford, after his exploits in the West of England, without arrest, puzzled me. The car was so unique in shape that it seemed bound to excite observation. It could not have been put up at any hotel, any more than it could have been run through the country by daylight, without exciting remark and its presence being chronicled. What, then, had he done with it? The more I pondered the question the more puzzled I became, and at the same time the more

determined to seek a solution of the mystery. But how? I made a dozen plans, all of which, upon consideration, appeared so futile, that I gave up the game in despair, and decided to see if my brain would not become clearer after I had paid my promised visit to Colonel Maitland.

I did not find Miss Maitland alone, as I expected, or I might probably have been tempted to confide my experience to her, and to have asked the assistance of her woman's wit in putting me on the track of a solution to the mystery. Mannering was with her. When I made my appearance in the drawing-room, and found him enjoying a *tête-à-tête*, I cursed myself for delaying my call and thus giving him such an opportunity. My temper was not improved either by the discovery that they were sufficiently engrossed in conversation to have been able very well to dispense with my presence. I did not feel called upon to leave Mannering a clear field, however, so I joined in the discussion, and tried my hardest to be pleasant.

Of course, there was only one possible topic of conversation, the theme which was uttermost in every one's mind throughout the length and breadth of the land. It was a difficult subject for me to discuss, and in a measure it was a difficult subject for Mannering, inasmuch as it was hard to refrain from reference to the personal experience we had had with the Motor Pirate. It became increasingly difficult, when a few minutes after my arrival Colonel Maitland joined us.

"It was lucky for him he did not meet us, hey,

Sutgrove?" said the Colonel. "You, Winter, and myself, would soon settle a Motor Pirate, wouldn't we?"

I muttered something which would pass for an assent, while Mannering shot an amused smile in my direction.

"I wonder though we saw nothing of him," continued Maitland; "he must have been very near us last night."

"He seems to have been everywhere," I answered.

"He has the ubiquity of a De Wet," said Mannering.

"I hope I shall have a chance of meeting him sometime," I continued grimly.

Colonel Maitland chuckled. "Heavens! What a fire-eater you are, Sutgrove. One might almost take you for a sub in a cavalry regiment."

I made no answer, and Miss Maitland remarked—"I think that is very unkind of you. You spoke of the Motor Pirate as if you owed him a grudge. I think we all ought to be supremely thankful to him for having made the wettest day we have had this year pass quite pleasantly."

Bear him a grudge? I should think I did, but at the same time, I had no intention of confessing the reason, so I said—

"Then we'll drink long life and prosperity to him the next time we have a bottle of that same port your father approved so highly last night." Then I turned to the Colonel, and made a clumsy attempt to turn the subject of conversation. "Is your verdict upon my restaurant equally favourable to-day, sir?"

Colonel Maitland's eyes twinkled. "I have nothing to regret. As for the port with which we finished, it seems to me the sort of stuff dreams are made of. Do you know that the glass I drank—was it one glass or two?—gave me the most vivid dream I have enjoyed since my childhood?"

"Indeed! Let's hear it, Colonel," I replied.

"Do tell us," said his daughter, as she rose from her seat, and put her arms coaxingly round her father's neck. "Do tell us like a real, good, kind, old-fashioned parent."

The Colonel passed his hand lovingly over his daughter's sunny hair.

"Sutgrove and Mannering don't want to hear about an old fellow's silly dreams," he said. "Besides, it was all about the Motor Pirate, and I can see that Sutgrove for one is quite sick of the subject."

I was, and I wasn't, but I speedily declared that I was not when I saw that his daughter was bent upon hearing the story. So he started upon a prosy description as to how the fresh air had sent him to sleep, not saying a word about the port, and I ceased to listen to him, preferring to devote the whole of my attention to his daughter, who had seated herself upon a footstool at his feet, and was looking up into his face with a pretty affectionate glance in her deep blue eyes, enough to set any one longing to be the recipient of similar regard. Her form, attitude, expression, all made so deep an impression upon me, that I have only to close my eyes

at any time to see her just as she was then—the little witch! She knew full well how to make the most of her attractions, and though she has often declared since to me that the pose was quite unpremeditated, I could never quite believe her.

However that may be, I was so fascinated in watching her—there was one stray curl which lay like a strand of woven gold upon her brow. Confound it! It's all very well for the fellow who writes fiction for a living to write about people's emotions. He is cold himself. If he were like me, and wished to describe his own feelings, he might find himself in the same difficulty as myself, and give up the attempt.

The Colonel's voice droned on. Suddenly I awoke to the consciousness that he was speaking of me. I think it was the fact of his daughter looking at me which recalled me to attention.

"Sutgrove had just looked back to see if I was comfortable, when he saw another car on the road behind us. We had not long passed through Radlett. You know the straight stretch of road just past the new Dutch barn on the left——"

My attention did not wander any more, and you may imagine my astonishment at hearing the Colonel describe in minute detail everything which had befallen us upon the previous evening. He could tell a story when he liked, and on this occasion his description of the shamefaced manner in which Winter had scrambled out of his car, and had handed over his valuables to the

Motor Pirate, was so ludicrous that I was compelled to laugh at the description. When my turn came to be described, Miss Maitland and Mannering were just as much amused, but I am afraid that my attempt to participate in their mirth was rather forced.

When the story was done, Miss Maitland rose from her seat at her father's feet, and, putting a hand on each of his shoulders—

"You dear, delightful old fibber!" she remarked. "I don't believe you dreamed that at all. You couldn't." Then she wheeled round on me. "Now tell me, Mr. Sutgrove, didn't that dream of father's really happen to you last night?"

What course was open to me but confession? I admitted the truth of the story, and the Colonel was so choked with merriment, that I feared lest he should be stricken with apoplexy.

"The cream of the joke," he explained, when he recovered his powers of speech, "was that neither Winter nor Sutgrove had the slightest idea that I was foxing. I intended to inform them directly we were clear of the Pirate; but when I heard them discussing the matter, and determining to keep silence out of tenderness for my reputation, I could not resist keeping up the joke."

"I should think it was their own reputations they were thinking about," said his daughter. "To submit so tamely to one man is not a very heroic proceeding."

I heard Mannering chuckle, and I felt mad. But I fancy it was not Mannering's amusement, but my

own consciousness of the truth of the criticism that galled.

Colonel Maitland came to my rescue. "I thought they were very sensible," he said. "Even a cripple with a gun is better than six sound Tommies unarmed."

"Sensible—yes," she replied scornfully. "But there are times when one prefers a little less sense, and a little more—shall we say action. I am sure you would not have obeyed so tamely?" she continued, turning to Mannering.

He smiled, and I felt as if it would give me exquisite pleasure to catch him by the throat, and twist the smile out of his dark, handsome face.

"Really, Miss Maitland," he replied, "you flatter me. You should not be too hard on Sutgrove. I am sure that it was only the full comprehension of his own helplessness which prevented him making a fight of it. What could he have done?"

"Oh, a man should always know what to do!" she answered petulantly. "Has any one ever tried to hold you up?"

"Well, yes," he answered. "Once when I was out in the west of the States, some of the regulation bands tried the game on a train in which I was travelling. But then, you see, the conductor in the railway-car in which I happened to be seated had a six-shooter. So had I. The other passengers got as near the floor as they possibly could when the shooting began. I was in pretty good practice in those days, don't you know,

so the other chaps didn't get much of a look in. We took the four they left behind them when they bolted on to the next station with us. Three of them were buried there, if I remember aright."

"There," said Miss Maitland, with an unmistakable look of admiration in her eyes; "I knew you were different."

"But then I was armed. If I had not been, I should have been on the floor with the other passengers."

In reply she merely gave him one glance. Mannering returned it with one equally eloquent. I rose, and stalked to the window. To me Mannering's championship was an aggravation which I could not bear. Harder still was it for me to observe the understanding which obviously existed between him and Miss Maitland. Hitherto I had imagined that I had as good a chance of winning her love as he had. But at this moment I felt that my hopes had been shattered.

I think if I had remained a moment longer in the room, I should have been unable to restrain an impulse to knock some of the self-sufficiency out of my rival. I left.

Colonel Maitland followed me out, and I heard him ask me to dine with him on the following day to wipe off the score he owed me.

Without thinking, I accepted. Then I went out into the rain.

CHAPTER VI

I AM ARRESTED

As I went away from the Maitlands' house I looked neither to the right hand nor to the left. Where I went, whether I trudged along the high road or tramped across country, I have not to-day the slightest idea. I was so enveloped in my own misery, that I was absolutely blind to all external objects. I could think of nothing but my dead hopes. So onward I went, stumbling and splashing through the mud, cursing Mannering, cursing the Motor Pirate, above all cursing myself for my own pusillanimity. Why had I listened to Winter? Why should I have allowed myself to be persuaded to play the part of coward, merely that Winter's car should have been saved from injury?

For a long while my thoughts were as aimless as my progress, but gradually out of the incoherence one idea crystallized. It was not an idea to be proud of. My bitterness of heart produced the natural result, that was all—a burning desire to be revenged upon somebody. I contemplated revenging myself upon everybody who had anything to do with my discomfiture, upon

Mannering, upon Colonel Maitland, upon the Motor Pirate. Finally my choice settled upon the person of the Pirate as the most suitable object; for, next to myself, he was primarily responsible for my having made so contemptible a figure.

Of course the decision was absurd. Decisions that are the outcome of any strong emotion usually are. But it fulfilled a useful purpose. It gave my mind something else to feed upon than contemplation of my own unhappiness. It brought me to myself.

To-day I can laugh when I recall the childishness of my actions, the outcome of the unreasoned promptings of my puerile jealousy. For when I came to the conclusion to avenge my sufferings upon the Motor Pirate, I suddenly became aware that it was pitch dark; that I was in the middle of a field; that I was soaked to the skin; that the rain was still falling heavily; and that I had not the slightest idea where I was. However, I added one more to the acts of folly I committed that day: I solemnly held up my hands to the dripping heavens and registered my vow of revenge. Then I pushed on again, but with my physical faculties on the alert to discover where I was.

I began, too, to feel the discomfort of my position, and became sensible of a sneaking wish to be before a comfortable fire. I crossed two or three fields, and eventually coming to a road I followed it, and, after paddling through the mud half a mile further, I struck a village, and in the village an inn.

When I opened the door and walked into the cheerful lamplight of the bar-parlour, the half-dozen occupants of the cosy little room stared at me with astonishment. Well they might. I caught a glimpse of my reflection in the glass behind the bottles—if you have ever seen a corpse fished up by the drags from a river bed, you will be able to form some idea of the appearance I presented—so that I did not resent their stare. In fact, I was not in a condition to be able to pay much attention to the curious glances of the villagers. The warmth of the room together with the sudden cessation of exertion were for the moment too much for me, and it was as much as I could do to stagger to the nearest chair.

Fortunately the landlord was a man with some modicum of common sense. I am quite sure that I should have been unceremoniously ejected from nine public houses out of ten. But mine host of the White Horse—I learned afterwards that he had been whip to a well-known hunt in the West country—was able to distinguish between fatigue and drunkenness, and he came at once to my assistance. I heard him speak to me, but I was totally unable to respond. For a while indeed I must have verged upon unconsciousness, for the next thing of which I became aware was of a glass at my lips containing something sweet and strong.

I sipped. Then I drank. My consciousness returned. In a couple of minutes I could sit upright. The landlord was beaming at me with benevolent interest.

"Take another sup, sir," he said. "There's nothing like maraschino and gin when one is a bit overwrought. I've known many a gentleman in my part of the country who would take nothing else, after a hard day to hounds, to brace him up for those long ten miles home."

I took another sup, and a good one. Then my powers of speech returning, I asked where I was. I found I had not wandered nearly so far as I expected. I was barely six miles from my home—at King's Langley; but this fact was no criterion of the distance I must have traversed in my mad frenzy, for I saw by the clock that the hour was ten. It was about five when I left Colonel Maitland's house, so that I had been pressing onward for five hours in as wild a night as any on which I have ever been abroad.

I leaned back in my chair with the object of resting a few minutes before starting homewards. But, whether owing to the spirit I had swallowed, or to the heavy exertion I had undergone, or merely because of my intense mental fatigue, I felt drowsiness overcoming me so rapidly that I perceived it would never do for me to give way to it. Pulling myself together I rose to my feet, at the same time thrusting my hand into my pocket for the money to pay for my drink. The mere act of rising, however, was almost too much for me. My body felt as stiff as if I had been beaten all over. Only to move was absolute physical pain. I looked at the landlord.

"I'm afraid I am more knocked up than I thought. Can you manage a hot bath and a bed for me to-night?" I asked.

He glanced at me curiously, and, after a moment's consideration, he replied—

"I'll see what the missus'll say."

Luckily "the missus" said "Yes," so ten minutes later I was sluicing hot water over my aching limbs with a stable sponge in the bath which, I suspect, did duty on ordinary occasions for the family washing. Whatever it was, it did excellently well for my purpose. Gradually a delicious feeling of relaxation stole over me. I tumbled between the sheets and was asleep even before my host entered my room to take away my soaked clothing to be dried.

My sleep might have lasted one second. In point of fact I slept until nine o'clock the next morning, and should have continued to sleep if I had not felt a hand on my arm shaking me, and heard a voice bidding me arise. Fancying I was at home, and that my man was calling me, I said, "All right, Wilson," and turned over for another snooze.

"Now then, get up out of that!" said the voice. "None of your shamming! We are not to be put off that way."

It was not Wilson's voice. Wondering what was happening, I sat up in bed and rubbed my eyes sleepily.

"What the deuce——!" I began. Then I stopped suddenly. A couple of constables in uniform stood at

the bedside, and I gathered that it was the voice of the sergeant which had so rudely disturbed my slumbers.

"What do you want?" I demanded.

"You know well enough," replied the sergeant. "You make haste and dress yourself and come along with us."

I thought my senses had deserted me.

"What in the name of good fortune for?" I asked.

"You're not going to kid us, my good feller," he answered. Adding facetiously, "If we puts a name to it and calls it piracy on the 'igh road, I wonder what you'll 'ave to say to it, remembering, of course, that anything you do say will be taken down and used in evidence against you."

Then all that had happened flashed across my mind; my strange appearance and arrival at the inn; my peculiar manner; my possession of plenty of money; the curious glances of the village folk; the fact that somewhere in the vicinity the Motor Pirate had last been seen. Under the circumstances, nothing could be more likely than that the bucolic intelligence should jump to the conclusion that I was the famous criminal. To me, however, the idea seemed so absurd that I fell into hearty laughter. My merriment seemed to annoy the sergeant, for he declared crossly that if I did not dress quickly, he would find himself under the necessity of taking me away as I was.

I thought it expedient to temporize, and as a result

of a little diplomacy, in which one of the coins from my pocket found another resting-place, I obtained permission to breakfast before I left.

I made a hearty meal, the landlord attending upon my wants. I was glad to see that he, at least, had no hand in thrusting upon me the indignity of being arrested. He explained as much, telling my captors they were making idiots of themselves. As he seemed trustworthy, I gave him Winter's address, with instructions to wire to him, telling him of my predicament, and asking him to come to my assistance.

Necessarily I gave the instructions in the presence of the policemen, and directly I had done so I could see that their cocksureness was shaken. They became more polite in their attitude, and the sergeant took the trouble to explain that he was acting under instructions, and had no option but to insist upon my accompanying him to Watford.

Into Watford I went accordingly. I am not going to dwell in any detail upon the incidents of the journey ; I am naturally of a retiring disposition, and every circumstance attending my progress was in the nature of an outrage upon my diffidence. For instance, upon my departure from the inn, the whole of the population from King's Langley, so far as I could judge, had gathered about the door of the White Horse to give me a send-off. The crowd was in no sense a hostile one. The majority of its component parts, especially the more youthful units, seemed indeed to view me with admiration not unmixed

with envy. Only one yokel expressed disbelief in my identity.

"Ee ain't no pirut," he declared with unconcealed disdain, as he spat into the gutter. "Anybody can see he's only a toff."

I scarcely knew whether to be pleased with his conclusion or angry that he should find my personal appearance so unimpressive; and before I could make up my mind on the subject, I was seated in the trap provided for us and driven away seated between the two constables.

Our entry into Watford was still more in the nature of a triumph. Long before we reached the county police office I was wild enough, at being made such an exhibition of, to have given ten years of my life for the chance of punching the head of any one of the throng of gaping onlookers. Then, as a culminating blow to my pride, who should we meet at a point in the High Street where it was impossible to avoid recognition, but my rival Mannering in his trumpery old motor-car, accompanied by—above all persons in the world, the one I least desired to see—Miss Maitland.

I ground my teeth with rage, and as I alighted and followed the sergeant into the police station, I wished that I were the Motor Pirate in reality.

When I reached the presence of the officer in charge of the station I just managed to control my temper, though I fancy there must have been traces of my rage still visible in my voice as I demanded to know why a peaceable citizen should be subjected to such ignominy.

The inspector in reply merely asked me for my name and address.

Before meeting Miss Maitland I had cherished the hope that my identity would not be disclosed, but now I had no further reason for desiring to conceal it. I gave both at once.

The inspector quietly made a note of them, while another man in plain clothes, who was standing gazing out of the window, suddenly turned on me with the inquiry—

"How comes it, Mr. Sutgrove, that living at St. Albans you should choose to spend the night at a little inn at King's Langley?"

"I suppose I am at liberty to sleep where I like?" I retorted.

"Perfectly so," replied the stranger. "You will have no difficulty, I presume, in proving your identity?"

"Not the slightest," I said. "In fact I have already wired to a friend of mine—Mr. Winter, of Hazlescombe, St. Albans—to come here for the purpose."

"I know Mr. Winter very well," said the inspector.

The stranger looked at me keenly, and when his scrutiny was completed he fell to whistling a bar of Chopin's *Marche Funèbre*. Then he turned to his colleague in uniform.

"It's no go," he said. "This is not our man." Again he turned to me. "I am Inspector Carter of Scotland Yard, detailed for special duty in connection with this Motor Pirate affair. Unfortunately I did not reach

Watford until after arrangements had been made to bring you here, or—— I hope you will not take it amiss if we detain you until Mr. Winter's arrival."

This gave me the opening I had been wishing for, and I took it. I said a lot more than I can recall now, though I can remember a good deal. Most of it was to the effect that I would make somebody pay dearly for the annoyance to which I had been subjected.

Inspector Forrest listened patiently to me until I had finished.

"Come, come, Mr. Sutgrove!" he said then. "You must not bear any malice. Surely you must admit that appearances were not altogether in your favour," and he detailed to me the information which had led to my arrest. "You see," he said in conclusion, "that practically we had no option in the matter."

I dissented from his view. He said a word to the inspector in uniform, who left us alone in the room. Then he came close to me and remarked in a confidential tone.

"The fact is, our friend, who has just left us, has been too precipitate. You can make things exceedingly unpleasant for him if you like; but frankly, is it worth while? Think it over a little, bearing in mind that if we are to get hold of the Motor Pirate, we must take the chance of capturing the wrong man, since there is no description of him obtainable. You will not be the only one, I'll swear."

Since I had relieved my mind I felt better. Besides

I was rather attracted by the personality of the man who was speaking to me. He did not at all fulfil my idea of a detective. He was a tall, slight, stiffly built man, with a pleasant open face and an agreeable manner. I saw, too, that I had only my own folly to blame for the predicament in which I now found myself.

In another ten minutes he was smoking one of my cigars and we were chatting confidentially. Before twenty had elapsed, I had confided to him not only Winter's and my own experience with the Motor Pirate, but also the chain of events which had led to my spending the night at the inn. He was exceedingly sympathetic and quite grave throughout, though he appeared more interested in the encounter with the Pirate than in the account of my mental tortures. However, when I told him of my vow, he brightened up and asked me if I was still determined to keep it.

I had just assured him that I would willingly spend the rest of my life in the quest, when the other inspector entered the room and with him Winter. The latter came straight across to me and held out his hand, and never in my life was I so glad to see his honest face and beaming smile.

"What have you been up to now, Sutgrove?" he remarked. "Not emulating the deeds of the Motor Pirate?"

"The police have somehow arrived at the conclusion that I am that distinguished person himself," I replied ruefully.

He roared with laughter. It was infectious. There was no help for it. The two inspectors joined in the merriment, and the last of my anger was borne away on the flood.

There was of course no question of my further detention. In a few minutes I was seated beside Winter in his car, and we were making the mud fly as we dashed towards St. Albans.

Inspector Forrest accompanied us. I had promised to find him some lunch if he would do so, and to drive him back afterwards, and he was glad of the opportunity of obtaining from us such particulars as we could furnish him with concerning the person of whom he was in search.

CHAPTER VII

I MAKE FRIENDS WITH INSPECTOR FORREST, C.I.D.

"The telegraph," said Inspector Forrest, sententiously "is even more speedy than the Motor Pirate."

"Unless you want to send a message from Regent Street to the City," I remarked; "in which case one would save time by employing a sloth as messenger."

The inspector waved aside the objection as frivolous. He occupied an easy chair opposite me; he was smoking one of my best cigars with every sign of active enjoyment; he sipped his glass of claret—he rarely touched anything stronger, he informed me—with the air of a connoisseur.

"We shall beat him with the telegraph," said he. "Clearly he has one retreat where he can put up his car in safety. Probably he has more than one. It is not impossible for him to have several. There might even be a number of Motor Pirates, members of the same gang, but selecting different parts of the country upon which to prey. The telegraph will soon settle these points for us. When next he makes his appearance we shall be able to keep watch upon him, to note, if not the

exact spot, at least in what part of the country he makes his appearance. Even if it should be found impossible to arrest him in his progress, he is bound to leave some traces behind him which will enable us to get upon his track."

"He does not seem to have left many behind him at present," I replied.

"No," said the inspector thoughtfully, as he rose and examined the map spread out upon the table. "Yet there are certainly grounds for believing that he has gone to earth somewhere in this neighbourhood. The Hertfordshire police may have been nearer the mark than you thought when they arrested you."

"You don't mean to say that you still suspect me?" I cried.

"Not for one instant," he answered promptly. "The meaning I meant to convey was that, quite unknown to you, the Motor Pirate may very well be your near neighbour. I suppose there is no one residing near whom you would consider a likely object of suspicion?"

There flashed across my mind the strange similarity between Mannering's voice and the Motor Pirate's. But the notion was so absurd I was ashamed to mention it. I assured the inspector I knew of no one.

"At all events, my belief is strong enough to keep me in this district until I hear something further," he declared, as he finished the contents of his glass and glanced at his watch.

Just then I caught sight of Mannering coming up the path through the garden towards my front door.

"You had better stay a little longer," I said to the inspector. "Here is another man coming who may be able to give you some more details of the Pirate. He has seen him, and as he has been a longer resident here than myself, he may be able to tell you more about the people round than I can."

"A motorist?" he asked.

"Yes, named Mannering," I replied. "He is the man I told you about, whom I consider to be my rival, you know."

The inspector's eyes twinkled. "I shouldn't let him drive me into any more adventures like last night's, Mr. Sutgrove," he advised. "If you were ten years older —my age, you know—you wouldn't need the warning. A bout of rheumatic fever would be small consolation for the loss of the lady."

I could not reply, for at that moment Mannering entered.

"Glad to see you home again, Sutgrove," he said heartily. "I'm not the only one either. Miss Maitland asked me to call, for after seeing you in such bad company this morning—— Hullo! I beg your pardon, I thought you were alone." He stopped suddenly on catching sight of Inspector Forrest.

I introduced my guest and Mannering acknowledged the introduction easily.

"Inspector Forrest will assure you that I have only

been unfortunate enough to have been the object of our local constabulary's misplaced zeal. They took me for our mutual friend the Motor Pirate."

"Did they though? What an almighty spoof!" said Mannering. "First time I ever heard of a man being run in for robbing himself on the high-road. Beats Gilbert!"

"Mr. Sutgrove did not see the point of the joke at first," said the inspector. I saw that as he spoke he was taking note of Mannering in much the same way as he had taken stock of me at the police office.

Mannering appeared to be quite unconscious of his regard, for he replied—

"Don't suppose I should have relished such a mistake myself. Anyway," he continued, turning to me, "you have the consolation of knowing that you are not the only victim of police enterprise. I see from the papers quite half a dozen motor pirates have been run in. They may have the real one amongst them; but as his car has so far escaped capture, I doubt it."

"So do I," I remarked. "And for the additional reason that I have a sort of presentiment that when his capture is brought about, I am going to have a hand in it."

"What do you say to that, Inspector?" he answered. "Are you going to leave the job to amateurs?"

"I never said 'no' to the offer of assistance in running down a criminal," was the reply.

"I have sworn," I remarked obstinately, "that I will not rest until he is safe under lock and key."

"You had better be prepared," answered Mannering. "I should judge him to be a bit of a fighter."

"Next time I meet him, I'll take all risks to come to close quarters," I continued.

"You haven't a car to do a hundred miles an hour, have you?" he said in a narrowing voice.

"My plan is a simple one. I merely propose to go out for night rides until he finds me," I said.

"I had some thoughts of amusing myself in the same way," he answered. "But, judging from your experience this morning, the only thing likely to happen is being arrested on suspicion."

"I'll take my chance of that," I said. "But before discussing the matter, perhaps you could tell Inspector Forrest whether there's any spot in this neighbourhood likely to serve as a hiding-place for the Pirate's car?"

A smile lit up Mannering's face. "There's the old coach-house at the bottom of the paddock next to my cottage. It has a door opening on to the main road. There would be room, too, in my stables, if I had not fitted them up as workshops for my tyre experiments."

"Stop rotting," I said, "the inspector really means it."

He became grave instantly. "Sorry I can't suggest a likely spot," he said, and then for a few minutes he answered the questions the detective put to him as to what he had seen of the Pirate.

He could give little information of any value, and when Inspector Forrest had elicited all that he could, he thanked Mannering and rose to depart. I accompanied

him to the garden gate. He appeared a little loth to leave me. Twice he turned away and returned to make some objectless remark to me. The third time he blurted out—

"About that suggestion of yours—taking night rides on the chance of being held up——"

"Yes?" I said and waited.

"I wish I had a good fast car at my disposal," he continued earnestly; "but the Yard would never run to it."

I felt a pleasant thrill run through me. It would be good to have his companionship and assistance in working out my self-imposed vow.

"If you can make use of it, I will see that the best car money can buy is placed at your disposal," I replied eagerly.

He took my hand and shook it warmly. "I'll see what my chief says," he replied. "When can I see you again?"

"I shall be leaving here at eight and returning well—between ten and eleven."

"Expect me about midnight," he said, and without another word or backward glance he stepped out in the direction of St. Albans.

I returned to Mannering, who did not, however, favour me with a very lengthy visit. Possibly he found my manner rather cool, but the fact was, that try as I would to curb my feelings, I could not but resent something of an air of proprietorship which I thought appeared in his tone when referring to Miss Maitland.

When he had departed, I got out all the catalogues of motor-cars I could lay my hands upon, and studied

them until it was time to dress for dinner. Several times I thought of breaking the appointment, for I knew I should have to give some explanation of my arrest, and how to do so without appearing an egregious ass I did not know. Finally I determined, if the opportunity were afforded me, to tell the exact truth, at least to the only person whose opinion I cared about.

I was glad afterwards that I had not sent my excuses, for I was lucky enough to find Miss Maitland alone in the drawing-room when I arrived. It seemed, too, as if she had determined to make amends for the mental torture she had unwittingly caused me the previous evening. So it happened that when she questioned me as to how I managed to get into such a predicament, I told her as clearly as I could of the state of my feelings. It was a blundering, halting statement I made, of that I am certain, and before I had completed it Colonel Maitland's entry closed my mouth. But I think she understood, for there was a little flush on her cheek when we went into dinner which had not been there when I greeted her, and a pretty air of seriousness in the glances she bestowed upon me, which I had never noticed before.

As far as the Colonel was concerned, he did not worry me for any explanations. He was bent on enlarging my knowledge of gastronomy, and having a new cook, he was much too deeply interested in the *menu* to spare any thoughts for my erratic movements. I am afraid, though, his teaching was wasted on me; for

while I managed to reply to his conversation, I had not the slightest idea what I was eating. My principal longing was to get the meal over in order that I might finish the conversation which had opened so auspiciously. The opportunity was not afforded me on that occasion, however, but the evening did not pass without my obtaining a glimmering of hope.

When Miss Maitland rose I asked her, in a voice which was low enough not to reach her father's ear, whether she would answer me one question.

"What is it?" she said, and her face flushed a little as she came to the door.

"Is there any one else?" I asked, my hand on the knob.

"What right have you to ask?" she answered.

"No right, I only ask it of your mercy," I replied.

She hesitated, then with flushed cheeks and a soft whispered "No one," she escaped through the door.

Over the port I took my new-found courage in both hands, and asked the Colonel's consent to my suit. I gained it. He even expressed the hope that I should succeed, but he warned me at the same time that I must not depend upon him for any assistance. He declared himself to be clay in the hands of his daughter.

"Evie always had her own way from the cradle," he declared, "and always will have her own way. If I were to say that I thought you would make her a good husband, I'm not sure whether she would not consider it a sufficient excuse to accept Mannering straight away. Personally I should much prefer you, but there's no

counting on a woman's tastes, either in men or wines. And Evie is a perfect woman, God bless her!"

I drained my glass to the toast and made an excuse to get away to the drawing-room. But I did not see her alone again that evening. Winter and his wife had walked over. Mannering did not put in an appearance, and his absence was something to be thankful for; and when I held her hand in mine as I bade her good night, I said—

"You have told me there is no one else. Is there any hope for me?"

She made no pretence of misunderstanding my meaning. She looked at me saucily, her lips parted lightly, her eyes brimming with laughter.

"Come and ask me when—when you have caught the Motor Pirate," she said, and with that answer I was fain to be content.

Thus it happened that I found myself fully committed to the work which was at that time engaging the attention of the whole of the police throughout the land. I welcomed the task. Luck might be on my side, especially if my new friend the detective inspector's assistance proved to be available.

And as regards assurance on this point, I had not long to wait before my mind was at ease. I found him awaiting me at my garden gate when I returned home. I invited him in so eagerly that he smiled.

"There's no need to ask if you are still as keen on this job as you were this afternoon," he said, as he entered my snuggery.

"Keener than ever," I asseverated.

"Then I hope between us we may be successful in running our man to ground."

"Have you heard anything further?" I inquired, anxiously.

"Nothing of the slightest value. A number of people have been through our hands, but of the Pirate—not a sign."

"Perhaps we shall get a clue in the morning," I hazarded.

"At present," he declared, "there's not a shred of a clue to work upon. Of course at any moment information may come to hand. He may endeavour to dispose of some of his plunder, or he may reappear, but until then——"

"What do you suggest?" I asked.

"I shall stay and thoroughly explore this district until I hear something further," he answered.

"I am thinking of going into town in the morning, to see if a more powerful car than the one I possess at present is to be obtained," I told him later. "I am hoping to get one capable of doing fifty or even sixty miles an hour at a pinch, so as to be prepared for emergencies. Meanwhile, if you like to make this house your headquarters, I shall be delighted to put you up."

"Do you really mean that, Mr. Sutgrove?" he asked.

"Of course I do," I replied.

He hesitated a moment, then he accepted my invitation. Luck was on my side after all.

CHAPTER VIII

MURDER

I LEARNED to know Inspector Forrest very well during the next fortnight, better perhaps, since during that time the Motor Pirate gave absolutely no sign of existence. It seemed as if, contented with the sensation he had created and the plunder he had secured, he had retired into the obscurity from which he originally emerged.

For two reasons I was not sorry for this interval. In the first place, I found I could not get immediately the type of car I wanted. Manufacturers and agents were willing enough to book orders, but none of them had in stock the high-speed automobile such as I required. Only after a long day's hunt did I discover an agent who thought that he could obtain for me a 60-h.p. Mercédès, and then it would have to be sent from Paris. At my suggestion, he telephoned through an order that the car should be despatched to him at once; but two or three days elapsed before its arrival in London, and then there were certain alterations which I required to be made which took a week to complete. I was glad, therefore, that my enemy did not make a

reappearance until I was provided for him. When the new Mercédès was delivered to me I was delighted with it, especially when I found on my return from the trial run the engines worked as smoothly as when I started.

The other reason why I did not regret the Pirate's quiescence was because of the opportunity afforded me of cementing the friendship which had grown up between myself and the detective. It became a very real and warm friendship during those long idle days. He upset all my preconceived notions of the police, at least as regards the detective portion of the force, he was such an all-round man. He had not allowed his undoubted powers of observation to be entirely concentrated upon the seamy side of his profession. Judging from his conversation, I gathered that he knew quite as much about modern French literature as he did about French criminals, and of the latter his knowledge was both extensive and interesting. I remember on one occasion that he gave me a really acute criticism of the Verlain school, with special relation to the effects of decadent literature on national life. But that is only one example of his scope. Wherever he had been and whatever he had done, had apparently awakened in him the desire to see all round the case he was investigating, and being possessed of a well-trained memory, his mind was a storehouse of curious knowledge.

Let me give one instance. One evening when we

were driving slowly along a bye-road in the vicinity of Uxbridge, in accordance with our preconceived plan —the Mercédès had not then arrived, and our progress was additionally slow as the roads were exceedingly heavy, as rain had been falling daily ever since the night I had been arrested—suddenly my companion said—

"Do you know anything of Persian poetry, Mr. Sutgrove?"

As it happened, owing to the fact that a Sutgrove had once represented his country at the Persian court, I had a slight knowledge of the subject, and I said so.

"I am never out of doors on a spring evening," he continued, "without wishing I had the time to acquire a knowledge of it."

"Why?" I asked.

"It's this way," he replied. "On one of my jobs —a show job, attendance on a distinguished visitor, don't you know—I was thrown a great deal into the company of a Persian gentleman, and we did our best to learn something of each other's languages. He taught me out of Hafiz, and I picked up just enough to make me wish for more. Listen to this."

He recited to me one of the shorter poems from the Divan.

"Isn't that musical?" he continued. "It seems to me to have the real poetry of the spring evening in it."

I agreed with him, and we were silent for a while.

Later he asked me diffidently not to mention to any one his penchant for Persian poetry.

"Even at the Yard," he explained, "I doubt whether they would put it down to my credit."

I gave him the assurance he asked for, and from that time forth I came to look upon him as a personal friend. I confided wholly to him the hopes I entertained in regard to my love affair; and he assured me that if he had anything to do with it, I should also have a hand in the arrest of the Pirate.

All our time was not spent, however, in pleasant excursions about the country. Forrest was by no means idle; he had been busy perfecting his scheme for utilizing the telegraph in notifying the Pirate's reappearance when it should be made. Then he had in addition thoroughly and minutely explored the whole of the country round, to see if any trace of the strange visitor were obtainable. His endeavours were quite fruitless, but he still held to his belief that he could not be far away; and the next time the Pirate did make his appearance he was confirmed in his opinion.

The weather had been fine for three days in succession, there had been a drying breeze, and the roads from sloppy quagmires became in such perfect condition that I was looking forward to a really good spin. But Forrest had other views for the evening of the third day.

"I don't think," he remarked, as he sipped his coffee after our early dinner, "we can afford to spend the

night ranging the highways. Business first and pleasure afterwards."

"I thought you were of opinion that our friend will be tempted to make his reappearance to-night?" I remarked.

"I am," he answered; "and therefore the best thing we can do is to wait until we hear in which direction he makes his reappearance. If we wait in St. Albans at the end of the telegraph wire, we shall be much more likely to meet him than running about at random."

There was so much good sense in the suggestion that I resigned myself to the inevitable waste of time, and I had my reward. About eleven a message came over the wire: "Motor Pirate seen near Towcester going in the direction of Daventry."

"How far is Towcester?" asked Forrest, the moment he heard the message.

"Roughly, I should say forty miles," I answered.

"We ought to manage it within the hour, then," he remarked. "Come along."

Without another word we seated ourselves in the car, and with a continuous toot-toot of the horn we rolled out of the town. Directly we were clear of the houses, I jammed on the highest speed. I cannot say that I felt quite comfortable, for though I knew the road, the night was very dark, the light we threw ahead was so bright as to dazzle my eyes, and hitherto I had no experience of driving a 60-h.p. motor at top speed through the darkness. My companion's *sang-froid* soon

reassured me, however, and as soon as we were fairly going, the sting of the night air as it whipped my cheeks brought a sense of exhilaration which would have sufficed to banish my fears had there been time to have entertained any. But there was not. If you have ever driven a speedy automobile at top speed through a dark night, you will readily understand that there is little opportunity for the brain to cultivate imaginary perils. If you do not believe me, try it for yourself and see.

In about sixteen minutes we were at Dunstable. Passing through the town slowly, Forrest got news that the police were watching all the roads, but that nothing had been seen there of the Pirate. Another quarter of an hour brought us to Fenny Stratford. Here we wasted another minute or so in obtaining similar negative information. By this time I was feeling confidence in my car and in my powers to manage it. Once clear of the houses again, I let her rip for all she was worth; we simply flew along. With my right hand on the wheel, my feet on the two pedals, I sat as tense as a fiddle string, my one object to peer into the road ahead.

We had covered ten of the fifteen miles between Stratford and Towcester, when I became aware of a deeper blotch on the blackness ahead. With one movement I pressed down the clutch and jammed on the breaks. I was just in time. The car pulled up in its own length, though it swerved to such an extent that I thought we should be overturned.

There, standing still within the circle of our lights,

was another motor-car. It had no lamps burning, but it was shivering with the vibration of its engine running free.

"The Pirate!" I shouted.

"Not a bit of it," said Forrest, jumping down and approaching the stranger.

I followed his example, and the first thing I observed about the car was that all the lights were out, and I wondered that any motorist in his senses should have courted the accident which so nearly occurred.

There was one occupant of the car, and he was sitting bolt upright with one hand on a lever beside him. I shouted something at him angrily as I approached, but he made no response.

"Hullo! Are you asleep, sir?" said Forrest, as he put one foot on the step and grasped the silent motorist by the arm.

There was no reply. I saw Forrest leave his hold on the stranger, and, stepping back into the road, draw his hand across his brow.

"My God!" he muttered.

"What is it?" I asked.

Forrest caught his breath sharply. "A piece more of the Motor Pirate's work, I fancy," he said slowly; "and this time, I think it spells—murder."

For a minute I stood absolutely still. It was one of the most eerie moments of my life. Above and about us the black night, beside us the two cars coughing and grunting as if anxious to be moving, and that silent

figure sitting up erect upon his seat, utterly unconscious of the two persons standing watching him with horror-stricken faces.

Forrest's voice, clear, cool, incisive, brought me to myself.

"One of your lamps here, Sutgrove, if you can manage it."

I took a lamp from its socket, and held it while the detective made a brief inspection. It took him a very short time to assure him that his surmise was near the truth.

It was murder.

Right in the centre of the forehead of the silent figure was a small blue hole, so cleanly drilled that it scarcely marred the features of the dead man. One hand still grasped the lever, the other had dropped slightly. When the light fell upon it, I perceived the fingers to be tightly clasped about the butt of a revolver.

Forrest lifted the hand and glanced at the weapon. "One cartridge discharged," he said. "Surely it cannot be a case of suicide?"

Just at that moment I caught sight of a piece of paper pinned to the dead man's coat. I pointed it out to Forrest. He unfolded it, glanced at it, and handed it to me without a word.

It was just a half sheet of ordinary paper used for typeing, and upon it was typed the following sentence—

"This is the fate awaiting those who venture to resist the Motor Pirate."

"That would seem to settle the question as to whether this is a case of suicide or not," I said, handing back the paper to the inspector.

"H'm! At all events the inquest will," he replied. "I'm afraid in any case this ends our pursuit for the night," he continued. "I think I must ask you to run on to the nearest town for assistance. Have you any idea of our whereabouts?"

By calculating the time which had elapsed since leaving Stratford with the pace at which we had been travelling, I came to the conclusion we were not very far from Towcester, and I suggested I had better go there.

"All right; cut along then. Revolver handy?"

I replied in the affirmative as I mounted my car.

"Wait one moment," he called as I was starting; "and bring your light on a bit."

I did as I was directed. Forrest took one of the lamps and walked for five yards up the road, examining carefully every inch of the roadway. At last he paused.

"Here is where the Pirate's motor stopped," he said; and, plumping down upon his knees, he examined the surface carefully. Then, taking a tape from his pocket, he made a series of measurements.

I inquired what he was doing. He grunted in reply. When he had finished he remarked—

"Nothing much to be got out of that. Judging from my measurements, our friend might be driving a Daimler."

Another thought struck him, and, before starting, he asked me to lend him a hand in getting the other car to the side of the road, in case any one else came along and fell upon the fate we had so narrowly escaped. Then I was at liberty to proceed, and, getting once more into my own vehicle, I let the Mercédès drive ahead.

But my nerve had gone. Every moment I fancied weird shapes in the blackness before me. Every moment I heard in my ears the strange humming of the Pirate. Yet I dared not look round, lest I should in that instant come upon him unawares in the shadows in front.

Fortunately I had no long distance to traverse. Soon friendly lights broke the darkness. Slackening pace, I found myself in the well-ordered streets of a little town. The second person I met was a policeman, and, hailing him, I bade him jump on the car and direct me to the police-station. Nothing loth, he obeyed.

I have an idea that the story I told the sergeant in charge was more than a little incoherent, but he understood me sufficiently to become aware that his presence was required immediately at the scene of a crime, and he gave me to understand that he was ready to accompany me forthwith. Then I remembered Forrest asking me to see that the services of a medical man were obtained, in order that he might make an examination of the body before its removal, and I mentioned the matter to the sergeant. He at once gave instructions to the constable who had guided me to the station to knock up a doctor and follow us at once with him, so there was

very little delay before I was once more driving my car at full speed towards the scene of the tragedy.

By this time my nerve had returned. One reason may have been that I had taken advantage of the slight delay, occasioned by the sergeant giving instructions to his subordinate, to brace myself with a stiff whisky-and-soda from the small supply I carried on the car for emergencies. Now, too, I had the companionship of another able-bodied man on the car with me. I felt that, even if the mysterious murderer were to make his appearance, I should have a better chance of tackling him.

We were not long in reaching our destination. In fact a very few minutes elapsed before we came to the spot where the motor-car stood, with the rigid figure of its owner still in the position I had left him. I pulled up beside the derelict.

"Hallo, Forrest!" I shouted.

There was no answer. The detective had disappeared.

CHAPTER IX

EXPLAINS A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

I SPRANG to the ground by the side of the death-car. It was standing by the side of the road, just as I had left it, its silent owner sitting rigidly erect, still grasping the lever, and looking fixedly into the darkness.

"Forrest! Forrest!" I shouted again.

All was silent as the grave.

It was very strange. He had promised to await my return. I looked at my watch. Altogether half an hour had not elapsed since my departure. Yet many things might happen in half an hour with such a spirit of death abroad as I knew to be hovering around. I shivered.

The police sergeant was as much bewildered at Forrest's disappearance as myself. On our way, I had explained more fully the circumstances under which we had discovered the crime which had been committed. He knew my companion by name and reputation, and he was quite at a loss to explain his absence.

I scanned the road so far as it was revealed by our lights, half expecting yet dreading to see his prostrate

form. But there was nothing visible. Each taking a lamp from my car, the sergeant and I set out to search the hedges and ditches on each side of the road. We did so conscientiously for a hundred yards up and down the road, and on each side, but found nothing.

When we got back to the car, the sergeant said to me—

"Perhaps Mr. Forrest has found a clue, and thought he would waste no time in following it up."

The suggestion seemed feasible enough, but just at that moment my glance fell on something at my feet which put the idea to flight. Lying on the road was a large button. I picked it up. I saw at once that it had been torn violently away from the garment to which it had been attached, for a piece of the cloth had come away with it. I looked at it narrowly—the cloth was of the same material as the overcoat Forrest had been wearing.

The button had been almost under the wheels of my car, so I backed the Mercédès a few yards, and looked about for further traces. In the space thus laid bare there lay a lamp smashed to pieces. I picked up the frame, and saw that it was one of the lamps taken from the other motor. Further search only revealed another button similarly attached to a shred of cloth like the first one I had found. That was all.

The sergeant looked at me and I at him. One thought was in both our minds, and we gave utterance to it simultaneously.

"The Motor Pirate has been back again."

"You must have scared him away the first time, and on his return to complete the job he found the inspector here, and——"

The sergeant did not complete his sentence, but glanced apprehensively up and down the road.

"If he has returned, I don't see what he can have done with Forrest," I replied.

"Heaven knows!" the man replied, involuntarily lowering his voice. "I—I begin to believe that this Motor Pirate is—is the Devil."

"Nonsense, man!" I said sharply.

To tell the truth, my own nerves, in spite of the whisky, were in none too firm a condition; and I knew it would be fatal to allow myself to become infected by the very obvious funk which had seized upon my companion. I felt, however, I must be doing something unless I wanted to succumb.

"Look here," I said, "you wait by the car a few minutes, while I go two or three hundred yards further up the road, to see if I can find any other traces."

"I—I would much rather you—you didn't leave me," stammered the sergeant. "It's bad enough for there to be only the two of us."

"Come, pull yourself together," I replied roughly. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

"I don't think I can stand being left here alone," repeated the sergeant.

"Very well; you had better come along with me then," I replied.

He jumped into the car beside me with alacrity, and I started the motor, though not until I had arranged my revolver handily at my side. We went for a mile at our slowest pace in the direction of Stratford, and finding nothing, we returned, and covered the same distance in the direction of Towcester, with a similar result. Our progress was brought to a termination by our meeting with a trap containing the doctor, who was accompanied by a couple of constables. When we recognized who was approaching, the change that came over the demeanour of the sergeant was astonishing. All his courage came back to him. He talked to me quite easily as we returned to the scene of the outrage with the trap keeping close behind us; and when we pulled up, he took control of the proceedings as if he had never felt a moment's tremor in his life. He must have observed my astonishment, for he took me aside and said—

"I was a bit overcome just now, sir. You won't mention it before my men."

"Certainly not," I answered. "I was only one degree better myself."

"That's enough to make any one feel creepy," he said, jerking his thumb towards the silent figure.

We did nothing but stand about and talk in subdued tones, until the doctor had completed his examination of the silent figure by the light of my lamps. It did not last long.

"Death was instantaneous," he said, as he stepped

down from the car. "The bullet appears to have passed straight along the longitudinal sinus, and, as near as I can tell, he must have been dead about an hour."

"You would like to make a more extensive examination, I suppose, doctor?" said the sergeant.

"If a suitable place were available," he replied.

The sergeant mentioned an inn at a village not far distant, and, the doctor acquiescing, arrangements were at once made for conveying the body there, the sergeant and I setting out in advance to provide for its reception.

I am not going into any further detail regarding the proceedings of that night. Indeed I can to-day scarcely recall them. I know that I waited at the inn for a long while after the melancholy *cortège* arrived, and that I felt curiously dazed amidst all the bustle caused by the arrival. I remember eventually driving the sergeant back to Towcester, and making to him a long statement, which he took down in writing.

By the time I had completed this statement day had dawned. I shall never forget my impressions of that early morning as I rode home alone. The birds were twittering in the hedgerows, a soft white mist hung low down over the meadows, all nature was so serene and peaceful that it was difficult to imagine that the night which had passed had been so full of horror and mystery. I felt as one awakened from a dream. But on my way I passed the deserted motor-car. A constable was beside it, and I pulled up to speak to him.

"Seen nothing of Inspector Forrest, I suppose?" I asked.

"Nothing," he replied.

I gave him good morning and got on. I made similar inquiries at Fenny Stratford, and again at Dunstable, still without result. I comforted myself with the thought that at St. Albans I should certainly hear news of him. But no. I found the police wild with excitement, but entirely without any information as to what had become of the missing detective. I found, however, that they did not share my forebodings as to anything serious having happened to him. Their view was that he had discovered some clue, and was hard upon the track of the murderer. I had to give them a complete history of the events of the night. But I got away at last, and reached home as tired as I had ever been in my life.

I took a bath as hot as I could bear it, and went straight to bed. I was dead beat, and I fell asleep instantly.

I awoke some time in the afternoon, and when I had got the sleep out of my eyes, and the events of the previous night came back to me, I felt inclined to curse myself for having thought of resting. I felt certain that if it had been myself who was missing, Forrest would not have slept until he had discovered something concerning my fate. I made a hasty meal while dressing, and ordered my car to be brought round. Directly it appeared I hurried off to St. Albans.

Nothing had been seen or heard there of Forrest, and once more I set out upon the road I had traversed the previous night. Again I rode as far as Towcester. I had a chat with the sergeant of police, and found that, though search parties had scoured the country round for miles, no intelligence had been obtained. I made arrangements to appear at the inquest on the following day, and returned to St. Albans. Still no news.

I got home again about seven, sick at heart. I had counted so much upon Forrest's assistance in the fulfilment of my vow; but that was only a secondary consideration now. I had grown to like him so much, that the idea that he had met with any mischance knocked me over completely. I went into my study and threw myself moodily into a chair. My man brought me in some whisky, and hovered about until I told him to go.

"You were going to dine at Mr. Winter's to-night, sir, with Mr. Forrest," he reminded me.

The engagement had completely passed from my memory.

"I shall be unable to go, Wilson," I said.

"They haven't found Mr. Forrest, then, sir?" said the man respectfully. He was simply brimming over with curiosity.

"No. I'm afraid we shall never see him alive again," I groaned.

"Dear me! Not so bad as that, I hope, sir," he responded sympathetically, as he still lingered.

"Not half so bad as that, Wilson," remarked a cheery voice just outside the door.

My man started, and I jumped to my feet with a shout of welcome.

"Forrest! Forrest!" I cried. "Come along in, man."

"Well, if I may?" replied Forrest's voice.

"If you may!" I answered. "Why—what the—— !"

My astonishment at the appearance he presented as he entered the room choked my further utterance.

The man who entered was a veritable scarecrow. A man with a torn coat and rent trowsers, and a battered hat which barely held together upon his head. He was covered from head to foot with mud. His face was dirty, unshaven, disreputable.

"Forrest? Is it indeed you?" I could not but ask, when my speech returned to me.

"I don't ask you to recognize me until I have had a bath and a shave," he replied. "But when I have sacrificed to Hygeia, I expect to be presentable enough to dine with Mr. Winter to-night. I've been wondering all day whether I should manage to get here in time. Meanwhile, the least spot of whisky——"

I could not express my delight at his return, and unthinkingly I poured out nearly a tumbler of the neat spirit, and felt almost hurt when he returned all but one finger to the decanter.

"If you give me a dose like that, I shall certainly be unable to accompany you," he said.

I could curb my curiosity no longer. I burst out with a string of questions.

"Where have you been? What has happened to you? Why did you disappear? How——"

He stopped me. "So that's why you gave me all that whisky. You wanted to make me talk, eh?"

I laughingly disassociated myself from any such intention, and, putting the curb on my curiosity, I turned him over to Wilson to be valeted out of the semblance to a tramp.

The process took some time, and when he came downstairs in irreproachable evening clothes, there was no time for him to give me the history of his adventures unless we were to miss our dinner.

"And that," declared Forrest, "I absolutely refuse to do; for, with the exception of sixpennyworth of rum and a crust of bread and cheese, nothing has passed my lips since dinner last night."

"Then you will be glad to hear that the Winters are punctual people," I remarked as we at once set out for my neighbour's house.

"I suppose," he said, as we reached our destination, "I may count upon you not referring to the plight in which I returned to your place? I should not care for it to get abroad that the Pirate had got the better of me on the first occasion of our meeting."

"Then you have seen him?" I cried eagerly.

"Seen him!" Forrest ejaculated in reply. "Seen him! After dinner you shall have a full, true and

particular account of all that's happened. Until then—well, assume you know everything but are not at liberty to divulge anything."

I was as much at home in Winter's house as in my own, so I did not trouble to ring and Forrest followed me in. I had forgotten that his appearance was likely to create as great a sensation there as it had caused me. I entered the drawing-room first, Forrest being a little behind. Mrs. Winter, a fluffy-haired little woman with blue baby eyes, baby lips, and a most engaging little baby dimple, was the centre of the party gathered there. The other women were Miss Maitland and Mrs. Winter's twin sister, who reproduced the hair, lips, eyes and dimple with such exactness that it was always a puzzle to me how Winter had managed to make up his mind between them. About them were gathered Colonel Maitland, Mannering, Winter himself, and another man whom he had brought down with him from town that day. The subject of conversation, I learned afterwards, had been entirely devoted to Forrest's disappearance, and when they caught sight of him the effect was electrical. The ladies all jumped to their feet, the twin sisters screamed in unison, the men stood stock still. Mannering appeared to be the most astonished, for he turned pale and his lips became livid. Before any one could say a word, however, the door opened again and the butler announced dinner in an impassive voice, which sent everybody into convulsions of laughter.

We filed into dinner a particularly merry party. Mrs.

Winter had arranged for me to take in Miss Maitland, and the fact that Mannering obviously resented the arrangement added a great deal to my good humour. The fact of Forrest being the lion of the evening did not disturb me at all. Indeed I was glad some one else had to parry the numberless questions put to him respecting his disappearance.

He fenced them remarkably well, though of course, when cornered, he could always fall back upon the excuse of his mouth being closed by the official pledge of secrecy.

Needless to say, only one topic was mooted, and I should not have referred to it had not the man whom Winter had brought from town said something which, I found afterwards, had some bearing on future events. This person was a diamond merchant in his business hours, and after the ladies had left us, he expressed the opinion that it was a good thing the Motor Pirate confined his attentions to fellow motorists.

"If, for instance," he remarked, "he were to take it into his head to hold up the Brighton Parcels Mail to-morrow night, he would make one of the best-known firms in Hatton Garden feel very sick."

"How's that?" asked Mannering, carelessly. He had quite recovered from the temporary shock which Forrest's unexpected appearance had occasioned him.

"Well, I heard they are sending off a particularly valuable collection of stones by registered parcel post to-morrow," he answered.

"Seems a silly thing to do," commented Winter.

"I don't know about that," was the reply. "Their theory is that the chances of robbery are infinitely less than by any other method of forwarding. They have followed the practice for years, and hitherto have never made a loss. You see, no one knows anything about it except the principal, who takes the packet to the post office. He registers it at St. Martin's, and the packet is immediately placed amongst a number of parcels of all sorts, shapes and sizes; and the chance of a casual thief selecting that particular parcel, even if he had the chance, are at least a hundred to one, while it is well known that the postal employee who steals always lets the registered letter severely alone."

The subject was not pursued further, and soon after we joined the ladies. The party broke up early, and I was not sorry, for I could see Forrest was tired and I wanted to get his story from him before he turned in. But when we were back in my snuggery, I found that he considered it necessary to report himself at St. Albans. I was on the telephone, so I suggested its use, and he jumped at the idea. After some little difficulty we managed to get a message through to the police-station. Then settling down into an easy chair with a great sigh of content, he reeled out an account of his adventures.

CHAPTER X

DESCRIBING A RIDE WITH THE PIRATE

"When you left me," Forrest began, "I thought I would pass the time until your return in making a still more detailed inspection of the ground than we had already made. I found I had no lights. In order to get over the difficulty, I went to the car in which the dead man was seated and examined the lamps. They were in good working order, and I could see that their extinction had not been due to any mischance. Why they should have been put out and the machinery of the car left running puzzled me. I could only conclude that the Pirate, after shooting his victim, had approached the car to plunder him, but had been scared away by the sound of our approach. He must have turned out the lights and have just had time to draw the car across the road to make a trap for us, before making his own escape. This impression of mine was confirmed later. I took one of the lamps from its socket, lit it, and looked again at the dead body. I am almost certain he had not been disturbed since the fated bullet struck him. His coat was closely buttoned. His rug was wrapped tightly

round him. There were papers in his coat pocket, and I could feel through the coat that his watch and chain were still upon him. When thinking that the Pirate could not be far off, I regretted I had not accompanied you; but remembering you were well armed, I reckoned that if you did meet the gentleman, you were quite capable of giving a good account of yourself—and of him."

You who happen to have read my account of the state of my mind, as faithfully described in these pages, will be able to judge how far my friend's confidence in me was justified. For myself, I doubt not that had he met me, the Pirate would have been able to add a second victim to that night's list with little difficulty. This by the way.

"I did not make a very close examination," continued Forrest, "since there would be plenty of time for that when the doctor arrived. Besides, I wished him to see the body in the position we found it. So I turned my attention to the road again, going over the surface inch by inch in the most methodical manner. You never know, you see, whether some trifling object may not be dropped by the criminal which will provide a clue. I was so engaged when I became aware of a curious humming sound in the air. I stood upright and peered into the darkness. But my eyes had become dazzled by looking at the white road in the brilliant light of the acetylene lamp, and I might as well have expected to be able to see through a brick wall. The most sensible

course to have pursued would have been to extinguish the lamp; but, instead of doing so, I stood like a fool in the middle of the road and waited until the Pirate—it was he without the slightest doubt—swooped down upon me, and if I had not at the last moment leaped aside I should have been bowled over. As it was, I just escaped being knocked down. The car pulled up with a jerk, and there, within reach, was the person whose capture would have—well, you can guess what it would have meant to me, if I could have managed to get him single-handed. But for the moment I was so astounded at the audacity of the rascal I could do nothing. I was not long in making up my mind to have a shot at capturing him, however. I dropped the lamp to the ground, and slipping my hand into my pocket I grasped my revolver. I knew I had to deal with a desperate character, but I was scarcely prepared to find him as physically powerful as he proved to be. I stepped up close to the car and with my left hand made a grab at him. It was a fruitless attempt. I found my wrist held in a grip of steel. I raised my right with the revolver. I was just a moment late in pulling the trigger, for he knocked up my hand and the bullet went wide. Before I had another chance, he twisted the weapon out of my grasp with a wrench that numbed my arm to the shoulder. How he managed to see in the dark was a mystery to me. He must have eyes like a cat—that man."

Forrest paused to light another cigarette, and after a couple of puffs he resumed—

"But the most startling thing was to come. Holding me tightly he leaned over towards me and said, 'Not this time, Inspector Forrest. You may think you have the Motor Pirate, but I can assure you that you were never more mistaken in your life.' Astonishment is not the name for my feelings at hearing him address me by my name. I had caught a glimpse of him before I dropped the lamp, but he was so swathed in his leather coat and disguised by his mask, that I should never be able to identify him. But I seemed to recognize something familiar in the intonation of his voice, yet even that was so muffled that I cannot be certain I have ever heard it before. However, I did not allow my astonishment to prevent me taking action. I threw myself suddenly backwards, hoping the weight of my body would upset his balance and drag him from his car to the ground, where we should have been on more equal terms. The jerk moved him about as much as if he had been built into his car. 'No, you don't, Inspector,' he said, with an infernal chuckle; and, so saying, he leaned over and, catching me by the coat, lifted me off my feet and swung me up on to the car before him. I'm not a light weight, as you can guess—I turn the scale at something nearer twelve stone than eleven—but he handled me as if I were a baby. I struggled of course, but my right arm was powerless, and he could master me with ease."

"I suppose it was during the struggle that you lost the two buttons from your overcoat which you left behind you?" I asked.

"Most likely," he replied, "though I knew nothing of them. Really his strength seemed diabolic. There was something else about him which to my mind scarcely seemed natural. At all my struggles he continued to laugh, but there was no merriment in his laughter, it was merely an even guttural cachinnation, the laugh of a fiend at the aimless struggles of a lost soul. It seemed to give him immense pleasure to see me wriggling on the smooth curved metal plate which formed the front of his car. I grew tired at last and lay still, hoping for a chance to better my position, for I came to the conclusion that in a mere trial of strength he was immeasurably my superior.

"When he saw my resistance had ceased, he spoke again. 'I feel inclined to take you for a ride with me, Inspector,' he said. 'I can assure you that you will find the experience a thrilling one. It is given to few men to travel with the Motor Pirate. The pace alone should prove exhilarating, to say nothing of the companionship and—what awaits you at the termination of the entertainment.' He chuckled again as he concluded, and I felt a cold thrill in the region of my spine.

"I made no reply. What would have been the use? But I do wish my right arm had been of some use, for I think in my anger I might have stood some chance of turning the tables on him. I quietly tried to rub the feeling back into it, but he did not afford me a chance of doing so for long. He produced a length of rope from somewhere or other, and, before I gathered

what he was doing, he had twisted it round me and bound my arms tightly to my sides. I was absolutely powerless, and I gnashed my teeth with rage at the helpless state in which I found myself. There was I, a detective inspector with a reputation at the Yard second to none, trussed like a fowl, and lying on the slippery surface of the Pirate car I had come out to capture."

"Not exactly a pleasant position," I remarked, as Forrest paused to moisten his throat with the whisky-and-soda at his elbow.

"No; but the worst was yet to come. He had no sooner secured my arms than he drew another piece of cord through the band, and fastened it somewhere or other. 'Now, if ever you pray, Inspector,' he remarked, with some more of his beastly merriment, 'pray that this rope doesn't break; for if it should happen to do so at the pace we shall be travelling, you will go to hell even sooner than I intend you to do.'

"With that he set his car in motion, and, judging by the way the wind stung me, the pace was something terrific. At first I attempted to pay some attention to the direction we took. But I soon gave up the idea. My position on the car was not one from which I could observe anything with any degree of comfort. With my arms bound, I sprawled out upon the smooth, curved bonnet of the confounded car, only held on by a cord which I expected to break and send me flying into the next world every time we touched a stone, or crossed a rut. My heart was in my mouth for the next hour or so,

but afterwards I think I grew careless or callous. He had pulled the cord round my arms pretty tightly; that numbed me all over, and the exposure to the air did the rest. I fell into a dreamy condition. I only know that never for a moment were we still. There was always the drone of the wheels in my ears, and whenever I made a struggle and opened my eyes, all I could see was the blacker streak in the blackness caused by the hedges flying past. Heaven only knows how far and where we went. It seemed an eternity until it ended. But by then I was very near unconsciousness. I have a sort of impression the car did stop. I fancy that I saw the Pirate's mask bent closely over me while he examined me, that I heard him say, 'I don't think, Mr. Inspector, your attentions will trouble me much more.' I do remember distinctly being lifted in his powerful hands. I felt him swing me once, twice, thrice; then I felt myself flying in the air, and the next moment my senses came back to me with a rush, for I plumped into several feet of water."

"Well?" I ejaculated, as Forrest paused to light another cigarette. I was so interested that I grudged him a moment's delay before completing the story.

"The curious thing to my mind is that he did not knock me on the head at first," said Forrest. "I can only explain it by the conclusion that our friend the Motor Pirate is a madman. But, if so, I undoubtedly owe my life to the means he took to finish it. The sudden immersion brought me to myself much more

rapidly than any other process could have done. In detaching me from the car he must have loosened the knot of the rope binding my arms; possibly the water made it slip further before it became saturated. I felt the rope give, and got one arm free by the time I came to the surface. I floundered into shallow water, and paused. By this time there was just a glimmer of light on the eastern horizon from the dawn, and I could see the bank was only a yard or two distant. Somehow or another I managed to scramble out, bringing half the bed of the river, or pond, whichever it was I had been pitched into, with me. When I was on firm ground I collapsed. I did not remain long on the ground, though. I knew very well that if I wanted to escape a severe illness, the only thing to do was to keep moving until my circulation was restored. So I got going. It was hard work at first. My limbs were so cramped and stiff that I was compelled to stop and groan after crawling every six paces. But the stiffness wore off gradually. I went ahead until I struck a village, and found out in what part of the country I was."

"Why didn't you go to the police-station?" I asked.

"Wasn't going to make myself a laughing-stock for a lot of country constables," he answered. "No; if I had got my man, I should not have minded what sort of figure I cut, but to turn up such a scarecrow after failing to get my man—not much. I had learned from the post-office window where I was. I had been

dropped near Shefford, a village a few miles the other side of Hitchin on the North Road, and I thought if I walked back here I should avoid all likelihood of getting a chill. So I started. I found I had a shilling in my pocket. I had more money about me than that when I started out, but whether our friend helped himself to the balance, or whether it fell from my pockets during the ride, I haven't the slightest idea. But the shilling was sufficient to provide for my requirements. The first public-house I found open I went in, and had sixpenny-worth of hot rum. My word! There's nothing like hot rum for putting new life into one. After I had drunk it I reckoned I should get here about noon; but I had not taken the somniferous effects of that sixpenny-worth of rum into the calculation. Before I had covered half a dozen miles, I found myself so sleepy that I could not keep my eyes open. I dropped off once or twice as I walked, so at last I made for a convenient haystack, rolled myself up in the loose litter at the base, and let myself go.

"That's how it happened I was so late in my arrival," he remarked; "and now, Motor Pirate or no Motor Pirate, I am going to finish that snooze."

He gave a prodigious yawn, and held out his hand.

"Good night!" I said. "The story of my adventures will very well keep until to-morrow."

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE PIRATE HOLDS UP THE BRIGHTON MAIL

On joining Forrest at breakfast the following morning, I found he had mapped out a programme for the day which promised to keep us pretty busily occupied.

"First," he said, "I must get into St. Albans, and see whether there is any fresh information to hand. If possible, I should like to run over to Shefford, for I want to look at the place where I had my ducking, and recover the piece of cord with which that almighty scoundrel secured me. Then there's the inquest at Towcester at twelve, and sometime to-day I must put in an appearance at head-quarters to hand in my report. Perhaps I had better train from Towcester for that. It will be making too great demands on your time."

"Nonsense!" I replied; "I can run you up to town very nearly as quickly as you could manage the journey by rail."

"I hope you won't have to return alone," he remarked. "I am hoping to be able to inflict myself upon you for a few more days; but it is on the cards I may be taken off the job since I have met with so little success."

"I hope not," I answered.

"I should be sorry, too," he said. "I am more convinced than ever that our friend is living within a twenty-mile radius of this house."

"What grounds have you for thinking so?" I asked.

"The very slightest at present," he declared frankly; "and until I have seen the police reports from other parts of the country, I will not commit myself definitely to the opinion."

I could not get anything more out of him then, but after he had made a note of all the information to be obtained at St. Albans—we were on the road by nine-thirty—he became more communicative. The information he obtained did not amount to much. On the previous evening, the Motor Pirate had not made his appearance anywhere; while on the evening before, the only outrage of which he had been guilty was the murder which we had discovered. On that night, however, his car had been reported as having been seen on various roads in the midlands, one appearance having been recorded as far north as Peterborough.

"That confirms my opinion," Forrest declared. "The Peterborough report gives the time of his appearance as about 2.50. The sun rises at five, and it is beginning to be light an hour earlier. It must have been about four when he dropped me into the water at Shefford. Hitherto he has not been seen by daylight at all. Clearly he must have delayed getting rid of me until he thought it was dangerous to carry me about any

longer. He may even have been close to his own home, though he would probably select a spot twenty or thirty miles away at least."

"It seems likely," I agreed.

"Certain of it," said Forrest. "Now we will get along to Shefford."

We had a very pleasant run, and a mile from the village, Forrest stopped me where a deep pool fringed with rushes skirted the road.

"This is the spot," he cried.

He left me in the car and scrambled through the hedge into an adjoining field. He came running back with a dilapidated overcoat sodden with water in one hand, and a piece of rope in the other.

"Thought I could not be mistaken," he cried.

When he was again in the car he examined the rope carefully.

"Just an ordinary piece of half-inch cord," he remarked. "It's not of much value as a clue, but as a piece of evidence—I have known a man's life hang upon a slighter thread before now." He chuckled grimly at his own pleasantry.

"Where next?" I inquired.

"Towcester," he replied; and I wheeled the car round, and we were soon making the dust fly again.

We were not detained very long at the inquest. Forrest had a few words with the coroner, so that after formal evidence of identification had been given, and I had made my statement as to the finding of the body,

the inquiry was adjourned. Thus plenty of time was left at our disposal, and we did not hurry on our way to town, even breaking our journey on the way for lunch.

The weather remained delightfully fine. Clean roads, blue sky, soft winds, combined to make ideal weather for motoring. We reached town about four, and went straight to Scotland Yard. Forrest went in while I waited for him. Then he returned for me, and, taking me up in the lift, he piloted me into the presence of the commissioner, whom I found to be an exceedingly courteous gentleman. He expressed himself indebted to me for the assistance I had rendered the department. I did not see that my assistance had been of much practical value, and I said so; but I added that I was very keen on the Motor Pirate's capture, and I should be glad to render any service in my power which would tend to such an end.

"Anything you can do to assist Inspector Forrest will be greatly appreciated," he declared. "Of course, it is not our usual plan to make use of outside assistance, but we are not so bound up in red tape as to refuse such aid as that you offer."

We had ten minutes' further conversation, and then Forrest and I left together. The detective was in high glee. He had obtained *carte blanche* to do as he liked. His chief had expressed every confidence in him, while urging him to spare no effort to obtain the Pirate's arrest.

"The fact is," he said, "the papers have been rubbing

it into us for allowing such audacious crimes to be committed right under our noses, and the chief is wild to get the chap. Half of the detective force are already engaged on the job. I fancy I should get him myself singlehanded sooner or later if he were a sane man; but, as it is, the cunning of a madman upsets every calculation."

"You still hold to the theory that he is mad?" I asked.

"Cannot explain his treatment of me in any other way," he replied promptly.

"Well, what's the next move?" I asked, when we had returned to our car. "I suppose we may as well go for a prowl to-night, on the off-chance of finding him."

"We might try a new district," answered Forrest. "You may have noticed that he breaks fresh ground every time he reappears."

"Where shall it be then?"

Forrest answered my question with another. "Supposing yourself to be in his place, and the desire to attract notoriety a stronger motive than mere plunder What should you do?"

There flashed into my memory what Winter's guest had said about the Brighton Parcels Mail, and I said laughingly—

"I fancy I should hold up the Brighton Mail."

"As likely a feat as any for him to attempt," replied Forrest, thoughtfully.

I glanced up at the clock in the tower of St. Stephens; the hands pointed to a quarter before five.

"Well," I said, "we may as well run down to Brighton by daylight and get acquainted with the road, since I have only driven over it once before. We can dine at the Metropole comfortably, spend a couple of hours on the front after dinner, and have plenty of time to meet the mail on the road afterwards."

"A most excellent suggestion," agreed the inspector, and his eyes twinkled at the thought of the programme I had mapped out.

We started forthwith. Reaching Brighton before sunset, I refilled my tanks with petrol before putting the car up at the Metropole and reserving a table for dinner. We had a wash, walked to the Hove end of the esplanade, and came back to our dinner with appetites equal to anything. We sat over our coffee a long while, Forrest making the time fly by spinning yarns about his experiences. Then we smoked a cigar on the pier, and so whiled away the time until eleven. If we had started then we should possibly have reached town before the mail had started, but as we were both tired of dawdling about, I proposed that we should extend our tour.

Forrest was quite agreeable. "Really we are out on a fool's errand," he remarked. "We are just as likely to meet him on one road as another. Yet I have a presentiment that we shall hear something further about him to-night. If we do meet him, remember one thing. One of us must get in the first shot, and it must not miss."

"Don't wait for me to shoot, then," I replied.

We got our car, and after a glance at the map, I told my companion where I proposed to go: a run along the coast to Worthing, there to strike inland for Horsham, from Horsham to make for the Brighton road about Crawley, roughly about a forty-mile run in all, and I reckoned that if we kept to the legal speed limit we should just about meet the mail.

Forrest made no objection to my suggestion, so we started at our slowest pace. I had very little to do, and the ride was one of the most enjoyable I have ever experienced. The salt breath of the sea was in our faces, and the roar of it in our ears. I was quite sorry when on reaching Worthing it became necessary to leave the coast. Inland the roads were absolutely deserted. We did not meet a single person between Worthing and Horsham, and for the first time I realized how easily the Motor Pirate's movements could evade notice. At Horsham we looked in at the police-station, and Forrest made a formal inquiry as to whether anything had been heard of our quarry in the neighbourhood; but, as we expected, without result. We remained there a little time to stretch our legs and to drink a cup of tea, which the officer in charge prepared for us, and on leaving we proceeded at the same steady pace, arriving in Crawley something after four. There we found that the mail had passed through a quarter of an hour before our arrival, and I questioned whether it would be worth our while to remain any longer on the road.

"We may as well make a night of it," said Forrest,

in reply to my remark on the subject, so I turned the car in the direction of Brighton again. We bowled along at about fifteen miles an hour, at which rate I reckoned on catching the mail within half an hour. But we were destined to overtake it in a considerably shorter time, for just after passing the third milestone after leaving the village, our path was blocked by the huge van standing in the middle of the road and all across it.

I pulled up at once. Apparently the vehicle was not much damaged, but the door was broken open, while the parcels with which it had been laden were scattered all over the roadway. One horse lay on the roadway perfectly still, the others had disappeared.

The moment we stopped Forrest leaped from the car; I followed his example. The first object which met our eyes was the form of a man. He lay perfectly still, and I thought he was dead, but my companion had sharper eyes. Taking a knife from his pocket, he hacked at cords which bound the man hand and foot.

"More work of the Motor Pirate," remarked Forrest grimly, as I came to his assistance.

The man was not dead, but he had been so roughly gagged that had we arrived ten minutes later he probably would have been beyond human help. In the condition he was, it took us ten minutes working vigorously to restore his respiration; and after that it took the whole of the contents of my pocket flask to restore him sufficiently to enable him to give us an account of the mishap which had befallen him.

Then we learned that the man was the driver of the mail, and that Forrest's surmise that we had happened once more upon the handiwork of the Motor Pirate was correct. He had, it appeared, been driving quietly along, when his attention had been arrested by the curious high-toned hum which presaged the Pirate's approach. He was wondering what the curious noise could be, when he suddenly realized that a long low car was beside him. He did not anticipate any harm either to himself or to his charge, for, though he fancied that the stranger was the noted criminal, he shared the impression, pretty common until then, that the Pirate confined his attentions to motorists. The stranger did not even call upon him to pull up. He ran beside the coach, then slightly increasing his speed, he drew level with the wheelers of the team. There was the sound of a pistol shot, the off wheeler fell dead in his tracks, bringing down the other horses in his fall, and swinging the vehicle right across the road. The driver only escaped being pitched from his seat by the strap which held him to it.

"Then," continued the man, "he ups with 'is pistol an' tells me to come dahn, an' dahn I toddles pretty quick. 'Sorry ter inconwenience yer, my good feller,' ee says. 'Don't menshing it,' I says, as perlite as you'd be with a pistol a pointing at yer 'ed. 'I want the keys er this 'ere waggin,' ee says. 'Sorry they don't trust 'em ter us drivers,' I answers. 'Don't matter worth a cent,' ee says. 'I've another w'y er openin' thet strong box. Put yer 'ands be'ind yer an' turn rahnd,'

ee says. I done it, an' ee trusses me up like a bloomin' chicken, an' sticks my own angkincher dahn me froat. With thet ee walks along ter the door and blows the bloomin' locks orf with 'is pistol. That did it. Ee looks inside, an' the w'y ee cleared them parcels aht was a sight—well, yer can see fer yerself wort it's like. The other 'orses were thet mad they kicks theirselves free. Ee goes froo the parcels cool as a cowcumber until ee routs aht the registered parcels. Ee puts them in 'is car. 'Tar, tar!' ee says, wiving 'is 'and, an' orf ee goes jest abaht five minutes afore you gents comed along."

When Forrest realized how near we had been to coming to close quarters with our quarry, he went aside, and for the first time since I had made his acquaintance, I heard him swear. It was a successful effort. He returned to my side the next moment.

"The telegraph is our only chance," he said. "Drive like hell back to Crawley."

I did. There we set the wires throbbing, and begun to scour the countryside for any traces of the Pirate. We did not give up our quest until eleven o'clock in the morning. I think we inquired at every house and cottage within a ten-mile radius of the scene of the outrage, but without finding a single person who had seen or heard of the Motor Pirate.

Once more he had appeared and disappeared without leaving the faintest clue to his identity.

CHAPTER XII

HOW WE EXCHANGE SHOTS WITH THE PIRATE

After the sudden flurry which the reappearance of the Motor Pirate caused, and quite as much in the country at large as in my own particular circle, we settled down once again to a condition of comparative quietude. Of course there were plenty of facts to keep the public interest alive and to fill the papers. The adjourned inquest on the victim found near Towcester supplied columns of copy, while the robbery of the Brighton Mail afforded unlimited scope for the descriptive reporter as well as for the special crime investigator, who at this time made his permanent appearance on the staff of nearly every paper of any importance in the British Isles. My life at home was made a burden to me by these gentlemen. I bear them no malice for their persevering attempts to interview me, but they were an unmitigated nuisance, since I had no wish to air my experiences in the newspapers at this stage of affairs. It was with the utmost difficulty I escaped the attention of the gentlemen of the Fourth Estate, for they even waited on my doorstep for the chance of button-holing

me when I went out in the morning; and pursued me so assiduously, that I dared not look a stranger in the face, lest my glance should be translated into a column of glowing prose.

I have said that the Pirate left no clue to his identity upon his latest appearance, and, indeed, at the time, such was the opinion both of Forrest and myself. But in the light of after events we learned that there was a clue, had we been keen-witted enough to have discovered it. In the course of our inquiries around Crawley, we certainly did not succeed in finding any one who had observed the mysterious car which every one had learned to associate with the Pirate, but we had been told casually at Caterham—we had not returned by the direct road between London and Brighton—that we were not the only motorists abroad on that night, since another man had passed through the town early the same morning. When we learned, however, that he had been driving a car of the conventional shape with a tonneau body, we paid no further attention to the information, concluding that he was a sportsman, anxious like ourselves for a brush with the Pirate. Our blindness was to cost us dear before we had done.

There was another supposition which I could not get out of my mind in connection with the latest feat, and a couple of days afterwards I mentioned it to Forrest as we waited, according to our invariable custom, at St. Albans for news of the Pirate's reappearance.

"Don't you think it particularly strange," I remarked,

"that in holding up the Brighton Mail, our friend at once searched for the registered parcels, and directly he laid his hands upon them at once made off?"

"A perfectly natural thing for him to do," replied the detective. "He would guess that, if there were any valuables, they would almost certainly have been registered, and he could scarcely hope to go over the whole contents of the van."

"Admitted," I replied. "Still, does it not strike you as curious that he should have selected the night when a valuable parcel of diamonds was there?"

"Well?" asked Forrest, his attention thoroughly arrested.

"It almost seems as if he was possessed of the same information as we were," I ventured.

"According to your argument," he answered, "the pirate should be either yourself or myself, Colonel Maitland, Mr. Mannering, Mr. Winter, or his friend."

"There remains Mannering and the diamond merchant," I said thoughtfully, "and I know the latter has never driven a motor-car in his life. Besides, he is scarcely likely to have robbed himself in such an extraordinary fashion." We had seen from the papers that he had, in fact, been referring to his own firm when he had described to us the advantages of the parcel post as a means of transmitting valuables. "He may have other friends beside Winter to whom he has mentioned the matter."

"There's Mr. Mannering still to be accounted for,"

remarked Forrest. "No harm can be done by inquiring if he was away from home that evening. What sort of establishment does he keep?"

"Merely a couple of maids," I answered.

"In that case there should be no trouble in ascertaining whether he was out or not," he replied. "I'll see about it in the morning."

He made the inquiry accordingly, but as he confessed to me afterwards, without expecting anything to come of it. His expectations seemed to be justified in the result. The maids declared that Mannering had gone to his sitting-room after dinner, and had been there with his slippers on when they retired for the night. They had locked up the house as usual, and the doors had been fast when they came down the next morning.

This investigation, perfunctory as it was, decided us against any idea of Mannering's complicity, and I fell back upon the theory that the diamond merchant must have communicated his methods to some one else. We sought him out in the city, and he assured us that he had never before referred to the subject. He did not object to supplying us with the names of his acquaintances who owned cars, and either Forrest or myself made inquiries concerning every one of them. All were to no purpose. When we had finished, we were no nearer discovering anything concerning the Pirate than we were when we had begun.

Then occurred an incident which should have opened our eyes, if anything possibly could have done so, to the

personality of the Pirate. But again we were absolutely blind.

It was the second week of May, and since, in spite of continued fine weather, our unknown terror remained in the seclusion of his hiding-place, wherever it might be, I had persuaded Forrest to come with me for a run one afternoon as far as Cambridge, proposing to return after sunset.

The roads were beginning to be a little dusty, but altogether we had a very pleasant journey without any incident of note. We left the university town about nine, reckoning upon getting home comfortably before midnight. There was a bright slice of moon shining, and we did the dozen miles before reaching Royston at a decent pace. We went slowly over the hilly road out of Royston and had passed over the worst of it, and I had just put on a higher speed, when I fancied I heard the distant hum which once heard could never be mistaken for anything else. Forrest heard it at the same time as myself.

"Pull up at the side of the road," he cried. "The car must not be damaged."

I obeyed, running the bonnet into the hedge and leaving the back of the car extended over the footpath. Meanwhile, Forrest had drawn his revolver from his pocket, and the moment I brought the car to a standstill I followed his example.

"Don't stand on ceremony," advised my companion; "shoot on sight!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when our enemy made his appearance, coming from the direction of Buntingford. Whether he had any intention of stopping and robbing us, I have no means of telling, but I think not, for he was travelling at his most rapid pace, and gave no signs of slackening as he approached. Once more I was astonished at the wonderful steadiness of his machine. He passed us in a flash, the car running as evenly as if it were upon rails. In fact I paid so much attention to this, that I was too late to fire with any prospect of hitting him. Forrest was more alert. As the Pirate swooped by, the detective's Colt spoke twice. So far as we could see, the shots took no effect, for he did not move an inch.

"No luck," muttered my companion, as the hum of the Pirate's car died away in the distance.

I held up a warning finger. "Hush!" I said.

My ears had told me truly—our enemy was once more approaching us. I leaned over the back of the car, this time determined that I would at least make an endeavour to stop his progress. The road was without a bend for a stretch of at least two hundred yards, and the moment he came into the straight he was clearly visible to us in the light of the moon. I did not wait. The moment I saw him distinctly, I lifted my revolver and pulled the trigger as rapidly as I was able. Before I had emptied three chambers he was level. I was just in the act of firing a third time, when a flash of fire spurted from the running car and my pistol dropped from my hand.

Something had struck me violently on the arm. I felt no pain for the moment, only curiously numbed and cold. I wondered why my companion should continue to fire at the rapidly disappearing form of the Pirate, who appeared to me to be swerving from side to side of the road in the most ridiculous fashion. In another moment he was out of sight. I felt extremely sick, and, with something between a groan and a sigh, I sank back into my seat.

"I fancy one of us must have got him," said Forrest, in an excited tone. "Let us get on."

"I hope you are right," I answered. "For he has certainly managed to wing me."

The shock had passed off, and, with the return of sensation, my arm felt as if a red-hot iron had been run through it, while there was a similar sort of feeling about my chest.

"Really," said Forrest, as he looked closely into my face. He must have seen that I was not joking, for he jumped out of the car and came back with one of the lamps in his hand. "Where is it?" he asked, with some anxiety.

"Merely the arm, I fancy," I replied.

He took a knife from his pocket, and, without a moment's hesitation, ripped up the sleeve of the over-coat and under-coat which I was wearing. The shirt-sleeve was already soaked with blood, and his face was curiously anxious as he cut away the linen and felt the bone from wrist to shoulder. Then his face cleared.

"Only through the muscle," he remarked. "A fortnight will see the wound completely healed."

Meanwhile he was tearing his handkerchief into strips, and, with this improvised bandage, he bound up the wound.

"Sure that is all?" he asked, when he had tightened it to his satisfaction.

"I've got much the same sort of feeling here," I replied, tapping my chest gingerly.

His face grew grave again, and before doing anything more he fished my flask out of my pocket, and insisted upon my taking a liberal draught of the contents. Not until then would he examine me.

"Your bleeding powers would do credit to a bullock," he commented, as he cut away my shirt; "but beyond loss of blood, I don't think there's much harm done."

His first impression was correct. A cursory examination was quite sufficient to convince him that I was not much hurt.

"Just a nasty furrow," he remarked. "Pretty painful, I suppose. The bullet glanced off, turned by that leather coat of yours, I presume. Lucky for you; as it is, you will be all right in the fortnight."

I felt relieved by his tone, and assured him, when he had patched me up temporarily with strips torn from my shirt-sleeves and my own handkerchief, that I felt very little of the injury.

"Now take my seat," he said, as he buttoned my

coat round me. "I think I have had enough experience of motoring to ensure my taking you in safety to the nearest surgeon. It's infernally bad luck, though," he continued. "I would swear one of us must have hit our friend, and if we were only in a position to follow him up, we should be pretty certain to effect a capture."

My mind had been considerably relieved to find that I was not seriously injured, and the dose of whisky I had taken had pulled me together.

"You've bound me up pretty tightly?" I asked.

"You are right enough until we find a doctor," he answered.

"In that case," I said, "if there's any chance of our catching our man to-night, I'm not going to chuck it away. Put the light back and let us get on."

My mind was made up on the subject. One reason was that physical pain always makes me feel mad, and I would have given a great deal to get even with the Pirate for that reason alone. Besides, call it vanity or what you will, I wasn't going to let any one say I had allowed a scratch to bowl me over. So the moment Forrest had replaced the light, I resumed my seat in the car, asserting that I was fully capable of driving.

The detective attempted to dissuade me from the attempt, but I was bent upon having my own way. He did not argue the question at any length, for as soon as he was in the car I backed into the middle of the road and jammed on our highest speed.

In three minutes we were at Buntingford, and there we nearly ran into a group of people who were gathered in the middle of the road. They were discussing, as it happened, the appearance of the Pirate, who had passed through the town twenty minutes previously. Here Forrest made another futile attempt to persuade me to see a surgeon immediately, but I would not listen to him. We swept onward. I could scarcely see, but I sent the Mercédès along recklessly, stopping for nothing until we reached Ware. I would never have driven in the manner I did in calmer moments. Forrest told me afterwards that his journey on the Pirate's car was nothing to it, for the car rocked so from side to side of the road that he was never certain whether I was not steering for the hedges; while at every bend his heart was in his mouth when he realized that the wheels were never on the ground together.

On the outskirts of Ware we learned that the Pirate had been seen approaching the town, but that, instead of passing through the narrow streets, he had doubled back in the direction of Stevenage. He had kept his twenty minutes' start and I was for following him. Forrest was of another opinion.

"According to his usual custom, he is obviously avoiding the towns," he argued; "and if, as I still suspect, his hiding-place is in the vicinity of St. Albans, we shall stand some chance of cutting him off if we take the most direct route. He cannot be badly hurt, or we should have picked him up before this, and under any other circumstance we are not likely to overtake him."

I saw the force of his reasoning and we flew on. We heard nothing of him neither in Hertford nor in Hatfield.

"Our only chance is at St. Albans," remarked my companion, and once more I put my car to top speed.

We were just about half way between the two towns when we saw the lights of a motor ahead. I sounded the horn, or rather Forrest did, but the vehicle made no attempt to get out of the way. We caught up to the stranger hand over fist, and not until we were nearly touching did I slacken speed.

As I did so the occupant of the car shouted out, "That you, Sutgrove? Never more pleased to meet with a friend in my life."

It was Mannering.

"Seen anything of the Pirate?" shouted Forrest, by way of reply.

"Merely had the pleasure of exchanging shots with him ten minutes ago," was the astounding answer. "Unfortunately he appears to have got the better of the exchange, for he has managed to put a bullet in my shoulder."

"We have had a similar experience, and Mr. Sutgrove is the victim," answered Forrest. "So I am afraid I cannot offer much assistance."

"I think I can get to St. Albans all right," he replied. "It's only the left, and I managed to get a handkerchief round it."

"If you will let us pass," I said, "I will run on to St. Albans and see that assistance is sent to you."

"Oh, I didn't notice I was taking all the road," he remarked, as he drew aside.

Once more we drove ahead at our speed limit, and five minutes later we stopped before the police office. There we found every one in blissful ignorance of the fact that the Pirate was abroad. Nor did any one else see him that night. Again he had mysteriously vanished under circumstances which convinced the detective more firmly than ever that his retreat was somewhere in the vicinity of my home.

CHAPTER XIII

OF THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING WOUNDED

I SUPPOSE I must have lost more blood than I had reckoned upon, or else the excitement of the pursuit had been sufficient to keep me going; but whichever it was, no sooner had we pulled up than I collapsed. I was never nearer fainting in my life. In fact I had to take another stiff dose of whisky, and even then I was only too glad to relinquish the steering-wheel to Forrest, and let him drive me the rest of the way home. He never left me until I was safely in bed, and the surgeon he had summoned had stitched me up.

Fortunately my wounds proved, as Forrest had foretold, more painful than dangerous. The bullet had carried with it some shreds of cloth; and the removal of these from my arm was the only really painful bit of work the surgeon had to perform. However, the medical man insisted upon my remaining in bed, and I obeyed his orders for a couple of days; but on the third I felt so well that I rebelled against any further confinement, and though still considerably sore, I managed to get out and about.

I found I was a little bit shaky, yet I managed to

get as far as Colonel Maitland's house, and there I found my adventure had been a blessing in disguise, for I could see from the manner in which she greeted me, that my last encounter with the Pirate had wiped from Miss Maitland's memory all remembrance of the previous occasion. There was only one thing to mar my enjoyment of the situation thus created. Mannering had unfortunately been successful in making himself a candidate for similar solicitude. His injury, however, was even more trivial than mine, the bullet having merely scored his shoulder. I wished devoutly it had missed him altogether, or been a few inches higher and more to the right; for in such case I should have had Miss Maitland's undivided sympathies and attention, whereas I had perforce to share them with my rival. I knew I had done nothing heroic; but if Mannering had not been hit I might at least have posed as half a hero, instead of which I had to be content with being a quarter of one.

However, I made the most of what glory I had earned, and I am bound to confess that I traded upon my sore arm in the most shameless fashion.

Fortunately the Motor Pirate at this time entered upon a long period of quiescence, so that I was free to make the most of my opportunity, and to devote the whole of my time to Miss Maitland's society. The detective was firmly of the opinion that this prolonged rest was due to one of our shots having found its billet, and declared that we should hear nothing more of him until he had repaired damages. The inaction, however, soon

became very wearisome to him ; and when a fortnight had elapsed without a single appearance having been chronicled, he became quite morose. By that time he had searched over the whole district, but not a trace of any other injured person could he discover ; and he was as much at a loss for a clue to the identity of the Pirate as he had been when he first entered upon the job of running him to earth.

The Press by this time had nothing but jeers for the police and for the detective force generally. Meantime the most extraordinary steps were taken to secure the Pirate's arrest when he should renew his career. The Automobile Club had officially lent their assistance to the police, and night by night the principal roads of the county were patrolled by the members of the club, thirsting for the opportunity of distinguishing themselves by the capture of the marauder. The Pirate must have been vastly amused in his retirement as he read of the sensation he had created. I rather think that the man in the street looked upon the whole matter as the great sporting event of the century, and his sympathies were undoubtedly with the man who could so easily snap his fingers at the army of police, amateur and professional, who were engaged in the task of seeking him. In fact, if he had not committed the murder at Towcester, I am convinced that the public would have elevated him to the position of a great popular hero. Even as it was, he had no lack of apologists ; and an eminent ballad-monger celebrated his exploits in some verses, which were immensely applauded when recited by long-haired

enthusiasts at smoking concerts and similar gatherings. All this was gall to Forrest; and at last one day, three weeks after our encounter with the Pirate, he told me he could stand it no longer.

"I must try another line of country," he remarked.

"What line do you propose?" I asked.

"The only thing I can think of," he replied, "is to make inquiries in Amsterdam, to see if the diamonds which were taken from the mail, have been offered for sale. I am quite certain they have not been put upon the market this side of the water."

I was very loth to let him go alone; but he would not hear of my accompanying him.

"What! run away now, and let your friend Mannering have a clear field? I wouldn't if I were you," he remarked. "Besides, I can manage this sort of work better by myself."

His final argument was conclusive, and he went away promising to look me up immediately he returned, and expressing the hope that nothing more would be heard of the Pirate until his return.

On the very same day it happened that Mannering also took his departure from St. Stephens. I had mentioned in his hearing that Forrest had been called away, and he had then informed us—Miss Maitland and myself—that he had some business in Paris in connection with the patent tyre with which he was still experimenting, which would entail his absence for two or three days.

I sincerely trusted that his business would require a

much longer period to transact; and as he was leaving by an early train the next morning, I took particular care he should obtain no opportunity for a private leave-taking with Miss Maitland.

It was not a sporting thing to do, perhaps, but I was so much in earnest about my love-making, that I had no scruples about spoiling as many of my rival's chances as I could. However, as it happened, I found somewhat to my surprise that my tactics were not unwelcome to Miss Maitland. She confessed as much to me the next day. She—— But perhaps it will be better for me to give in some detail the conversation we had upon this occasion, since it had a considerable bearing upon after events.

The morning after Mannering had departed was as brilliant a one as June ever bestowed upon mortal. Now that my rival was out of the way, I thought I might dispense with the sling which I had worn hitherto, and directly after breakfast I strolled across to the Maitlands', with the intention of persuading Miss Maitland to come for a ride on the Mercédès. I found her on the point of starting for a stroll, with the object of giving her favourite Irish setter a run, and I was easily persuaded to abandon my projected ride and accompany her instead. We choose the footpath between St. Stephen's church and the village of Park Street, and, stepping out briskly, we soon reached our destination; and as my companion would not hear of turning back, we continued our walk to Bricket Wood. There I insisted upon resting.

I had never seen her in higher spirits than she was

that morning. She bubbled over with gaiety. So much so that I could not help commenting upon the fact.

"Yes," she replied frankly, in answer to my remarks on the subject, "I do feel gay this morning. I feel as if a load had been removed from my shoulders."

"Surely you can have no troubles," I remarked, half-banteringly.

A shadow alighted for a moment upon her face and was gone again.

"Nothing which ought to be a trouble. Nothing tangible and yet—— Oh, Mr. Sutgrove, do you—have you ever experienced a presentiment of something dreadful happening? No; that is not exactly what I mean. I don't know how to explain myself without——"

Then she paused, and I discreetly kept silence. Presently she resumed.

"Men are so stupid, or I would tell you all about it. You would never understand."

I saw my opening and made use of it. "We men may be stupid both individually and collectively," I said. "But I can answer for one man being sympathetic to anything you like to say to him."

She laughed. "I am so afraid you will think me silly."

"Miss Maitland—Evie——" I began.

"Hush!" She stopped me with an adorable smile. "You know you haven't caught the Motor Pirate, yet."

I summoned up the most injured expression permitted by my contentment with my surroundings and fell silent again.

"Poor boy!" she said mockingly. "It is unkind of me to remind you of your vow, when you have already done your best to fulfil it."

"Not quite my best, yet," I muttered sullenly.

"Anyhow I think you have done quite enough to warrant my taking you into my confidence."

She said this quite seriously, and glancing up at her, I saw she was looking into a glade of the wood with a preoccupied expression on her pretty face, which showed me that it was in reality no petty trouble which worried her.

"This scene is so delightfully restful. I love the cool green lights and the cool grey shadows of the woodlands in early summer," she remarked absently.

I had no eyes for aught but the face of the speaker, though I was indirectly conscious that there was a good deal of beauty in the wood. To me it seemed an appropriate background, that was all.

"Yes," I said. "But about this presentiment of yours——"

"It is hardly a presentiment; in fact, I don't know what to call it," she replied. Then she turned and faced me. "Now listen. There's an acquaintance of mine, whom I know very well and used to like a great deal. Yes, I think I am right in saying used to like. Well, for some undefined reason, my liking has change to something very like fear."

"For what reason?" I asked.

"None," she replied. "Absolutely there is no reason whatever."

"A case of Dr. Fell," I said. "Well, avoid your Dr. Fell."

"That is exactly what I am unable to do," she answered, and I could see she was speaking truly. "This fear has grown up in some degree, I think, from a subtle sort of consciousness that the person in question has it in his power to exert a curious influence over me. I seem to be drawn against my will into an attitude towards him which is not only against my judgment, but also against my inclination."

"Him?" I asked. "Him? Is it Mannering?"

"Why, what made you think of him? Does he affect you in the same way?" she said eagerly.

"Far from it," I replied. My first feeling was one of delight at discovering that my rival was more feared than loved. But as I thought over the matter, my astonishment grew. I had looked upon Mannering as a rival, and as a favoured rival, but I was not prepared to hear that Evie Maitland was afraid of him, or of any other man for the matter of that, and I said so.

"A month ago, I should have laughed at the idea myself," she replied, "but to-day——" She shuddered slightly. "Now you know why I feel so gay this morning. The fact is, when on awakening this morning I realized that I should be absolutely free from his presence for two whole days, I hardly knew how to contain myself for joy."

"Surely you must have some grounds for fearing him, something in his manner——"

"No. Yet I have thought—but it is nothing. When we have been alone together he has sat once or twice staring at me. I try to speak to him, but he sits and stares and stares, with his eyes so bright and all the time so sombre—so penetrating that I feel that he sees quite through me. Just like one does in those unpleasant dreams where one's clothes have somehow disappeared. To-day, and now, it seems very silly, yet I am certain I shall feel exactly the same the next time I meet him. Then when he sees how confused I am he gives a sort of a laugh, an unpleasant kind of a chuckle without any merriment in it."

"He's a d——d cad!" I cried hotly.

"I—I don't know," she answered. "I don't seem to mind at the time. It is just as if I were in a dream, for I am so fascinated in watching him that I have no thoughts left for myself. It is when he has gone that the thought seems unpleasant. Then I always think I will never see him again, but the next time he calls I feel bound to do so. There, now I have confided in you, don't tell me I am a weak hysterical girl or I really don't know what will happen to me."

She laid one of her little hands on my arm and looked imploringly into my eyes.

"I know you are neither weak nor hysterical," I replied.

"You will help me, won't you?" she asked.

I took both hands in mine and looked straight into her eyes.

"The only way I see of helping you," I said deliberately, "is for you to give me the right to do so."

She did not take her hands from my grasp.

* * * *

"Do you know, Jim," she said an hour later, when we came out of the wood into the meadow, "that I told you not to speak to me until you had captured the Motor Pirate."

"You could not answer for me, darling," I replied. "But I should not have done so if I——"

"Had not found the temptation to do so irresistible," she said, taking the words out of my mouth with so bewitching an air, that again I found an irresistible temptation confronting me.

We did not revert again to the curious influence which Evie had declared Mannering exercised. She would not allow of it. She wanted to think that he had gone completely out of her life, and that no more shadows were ever to fall across her path. And I was too happy myself to wish to refer to anything which should bring an unpleasant memory to her mind.

I shall never forget our walk home. The silver thread of the Ver, the old monastery gate-house and the ruins of Sopwell Priory in the foreground, the churches of St. Stephens and St. Michaels on either hand, and in the centre of the picture the Abbey of St. Albans brooding over all. We decided to be married in the abbey. I trod on air.

CHAPTER XIV

A CLOUD APPEARS ON LOVE'S HORIZON

MANNERING remained absent for a week, and during that time I learned from Evie a good deal about the curious dread which he had inspired in her mind. Had inspired, I say, for she assured me it had passed away, and that she felt quite safe now she was promised to be my wife. Our betrothal had been announced the day after the never-to-be-forgotten walk to Bricket wood, and I had hastened to make it known as widely as I could, for I could think of no likelier method of ensuring her against any further annoyance on the part of Mannering. When he saw that he had lost, I could not think that he would do otherwise than retire gracefully from the scene. If, however, he failed to take his failure kindly, I should not have the slightest hesitation about sending him about his business. I should have been tempted to do so without further delay, if there had in reality been anything in Mannering's conduct to which open exception could have been taken. Evie recognized there was nothing of the sort as strongly as myself, and she was even averse to do as I suggested,

and ask her father to hint to him that he should, for a while at least, cease his visits to the house.

"You see," she remarked, "if he had made himself offensive in any other way, I should have welcomed the opportunity of speaking to papa about it. But he has not. His attitude has been outwardly perfectly courteous, and papa would only laugh at me if I were to tell him what I have told you. He would not believe me if I told him I was afraid of Mr. Mannering."

"Besides, you are now no longer afraid?" I said.

"No; I am no longer afraid of him. I am quite sure of that," she repeated.

The manner in which she made the assertion ought to have warned me that she was not quite so certain on the point as she was willing to believe, but no such thought crossed my mind at the time.

"Anyhow," I continued, "if when you see Mannering again, you feel any recurrence of your dread, it will be easy for me to pick a quarrel with him, and so compel him to absent himself from the house. You see, he will be unable to come here without meeting me."

Evie pouted a dissent. "You must not do that," she remarked. "A quarrel with him would make both of us look ridiculous. Everybody would conclude that you were jealous; and I—I should not like to imagine any one thinking that I gave you cause."

"My own darling!" I cried.

* * * * *

When once more we resumed our conversation, I

bethought me of another plan, and I suggested to Evie that she could always find a retreat at my home in Norfolk, if she wanted to get away from Mannering's presence. My aunt, I knew, would be delighted to entertain her. She agreed at once to adopt this course if the occasion should arise. Thus I thought I had provided against every contingency for the short period which was to elapse before our wedding-day.

When Mannering did return, however, it seemed as if we had been making preparations to meet a contingency which was never likely to arise. He learned of Evie's engagement from the Colonel, the morning after his return to St. Albans. He took the news very well. Much more coolly than I should have done had I been the disappointed one. In fact, a few minutes after he had been made acquainted with Evie's engagement, he came to us where we were in the garden, and congratulated us forthwith.

"You are a lucky fellow, Sutgrove," he said. "I had cherished a faint hope that your luck might be mine, and now the only consolation I have is that the best man always wins."

Spoken in a different tone than that which he employed, his words would have made a very pretty compliment, but from his lips the words seemed to be very like a sarcasm. However, I could pardon the expression of a little bitterness under the circumstances, so I made no reply; and, turning to Evie, he continued—

"I trust your new tie will not put an end to the old friendships, Miss Maitland?"

"Why should it?" she asked.

"They often do," he replied.

"Not if the old friendships are the real thing," I interjected.

"No; not if they are the real thing," he repeated slowly. "I hope you will find mine to be the real thing."

A faint smile fluttered across his face as he spoke, and was gone in an instant. Neither Evie nor myself knew what to reply, and an awkward pause ensued. He seemed to feel the awkwardness of it just as much as either of us, and he changed the subject with an inquiry as to whether anything further had been heard or seen of the Motor Pirate during his own absence in Paris.

"I have been far too busy to even look at the papers," he explained, "and he might have been captured for all I know."

"No such luck," I replied. "This time he seems to have disappeared for good."

"I see I shall have to take up your job, and devote my energies to the task of his capture," he said laughingly. And, turning to Evie, he said, "I presume you will not allow Sutgrove to take any risks of that sort now, Miss Maitland?"

Again there was something sarcastic in his tone, and I could see by the flush in Evie's cheek that the question had angered her. She answered almost hotly—

"I am quite sure if any one can capture the Pirate, Jim can."

"I have no intention of giving up the pursuit just at present," I added quietly, with a glance of thanks to my dear one for her ready championship.

"I don't think I should trouble myself about any Motor Pirate if I were in your position," he replied. "I fancy if I were engaged to be married to the best girl in the world, the first thing I should do would be to eliminate every risk from my life, instead of looking about for fresh ones. Besides, it seems scarcely fair on the girl, does it?"

"Surely that depends on what the girl thinks, doesn't it?" asked Evie. "A good many girls haven't much admiration for the man who would act as you suggest."

"Ah, well!" returned Mannering. "I see now where Sutgrove has succeeded. The prize always goes to the adventurous."

Again there was a subtle provocation in his tone—something very like a sneer. An angry retort was on the tip of my tongue, but a glance from Evie checked it, and soon after he left us together.

"You must not be angry with him," she said, as soon as we were alone. "He does not know you as I do; and besides I think he—he must be disappointed."

"There's not the slightest doubt about that," I answered emphatically. "He is badly hit, and he takes it pretty well considering. I know I shouldn't have taken my gruel so coolly. In fact, that is just what

I don't like about him. One never knows what is going on behind that handsome mask of his."

"Handsome," she said. "Do you call him handsome?"

"Yes. I should say he was one of the handsomest men of my acquaintance. How could you ever bestow a single glance or thought upon me when——"

Evie placed her hand upon my lips. "You dear, foolish old boy," she said. "There is only one face in the whole wide world which I think is really handsome, and I have thought so from the first time I caught sight of it."

There was another interlude in our conversation—they were pretty frequent in those days—and the subject dropped for a time. It recurred frequently, however, and gradually I perceived that whatever subject we discussed, sooner or later, Mannering's name was bound to crop up. At first I rather encouraged Evie to talk about him; but, after a while, I discovered that I was ministering to the feeling which I thought had been destroyed. I could not help but notice that, soon after Mannering's return, Evie's high spirits became subdued—her gaiety less spontaneous. Yet when I asked her whether Mannering's presence produced any effect upon her, she assured me to the contrary.

Nor did I see how Mannering could possibly exert any influence over her. I took particular care that he should never have a *tête-à-tête* with her. Sometimes she would not even see him for a couple of days at a time,

and when she did, it would be merely for a few minutes, and nearly always in the presence of Colonel Maitland as well as myself.

It appeared to me, indeed, as if Mannering even took pains to avoid seeing much of her; and, though I watched him closely, his bearing was always studiously correct. He was the same *insouciant* person who had impressed me so favourably upon my first introduction to him. But whether it was owing to the distrust which Evie's fear of him had impressed upon me, or because I could really see things which had before been hidden from my sight, I certainly did observe about him certain singularities which I had never before remarked. I saw, for instance, that, in speaking of his face as a handsome mask, I had been nearer the truth than I had known. On more than one occasion, while his lips were parted in a genial smile, I observed in his eyes an expression strangely at variance therewith. It was the expression of a cat when it crouches to spring upon a mouse. I have seen that look bent upon my betrothed. I have caught it directed at myself. There was a restlessness, too, which gave the lie to his nonchalant manner. I could see that he forced himself to remain still. His fingers were always busy with something or other.

These were trifles, and equally trivial seemed the sarcasms which he directed at me now and again. These I attributed to the ebullitions of temper, natural enough in a defeated suitor. In my heart I pitied him, for I fancied I knew what a struggle it must have

cost him to stand aside and watch a successful rival's happiness.

As the days passed, a certain constraint appeared to have arisen between Evie and myself. I told myself that the idea was foolish, and yet I knew that it was not so. Mind, I had not the slightest doubt as to the strength of Evie's love for me. She expressed it clearly, yet there was something drawing us apart, and I began to be afraid.

Towards the middle of June the tension became so great, that I could see the time had arrived when it would be necessary to do something; and, one night, I determined to mention the matter. Accordingly, after dinner, I persuaded Evie to come into the garden, with the intention to speak firmly in my mind. There, however, in the faint light of the summer night, with the sweet scent of the early roses filling the air, I forgot everything in the blissfulness of my lot. We had paced our favourite walk once in silence—my heart was too full of delight for speech—when, as we retraced our steps, to my surprise, Evie burst suddenly into passionate tears. Some minutes elapsed before I could calm her, and when I managed at last to do so, it needed all my powers of persuasion to get her to confide in me the cause of her outburst. At first she said it was nothing but the hysteria of happiness. Then she asked me, with a fierce clutch on my arm, if I should think her unmaidenly if she asked that our wedding-day should be hastened. We had fixed it for September, so I at once suggested July.

Her mood changed at once. She said she was not feeling well, and that I must not listen to her. But being now thoroughly alarmed at her obviously nervous condition, I questioned her until I elicited from her that all her old dread of Mannering had returned, and with double intensity, in that it was accompanied by a presentiment of disaster to myself.

"Jim," she said, looking up into my face with eyes which glowed in the faint light like stars, "I shall not feel sure of you until I am with you always. I want to be near you to look after you. Every moment you are absent from my side, I am imagining all sorts of horrible things happening to you. And it is worse to bear, because, it seems to me, that I am the cause of it all."

I strove to laugh away her fears, but, say what I would, I could not dispel the thought in her mind that some disaster threatened our love. Probing her mind for the foundation of her belief, I was not surprised to find that Mannering had something to do with it.

I did my best to make her mind easy, while determining that I would at once take steps to secure change of air and scene for her at some spot where my late rival should not come. She became tolerably composed at last, and I took her back to the drawing-room, where I was glad to find Mrs. Winter, in whom I recognized a most useful sedative for over-excited nerves.

We had a little music, and with that and the commonplaces of conversation, the evening passed until eleven

had struck, and the Colonel's yawns warned me that the time had arrived for taking my departure.

The Winters and myself had just risen to leave when we heard a hasty step on the gravel outside, and, turning, we saw a man's figure at one of the French windows opening on to the garden.

"Hullo!" said the Colonel. "Who's that?"

The new-comer stepped into the room, and, as the light fell upon his face, I recognized Forrest. He nodded to me and turned to the Colonel.

"I trust you will excuse this unceremonious call of mine, Colonel Maitland," he said. "But I was desirous of seeing Mr. Sutgrove immediately, and I guessed I should find him here."

"I'll excuse you, if you will come to the smoking-room and drink Mr. Sutgrove's health in a whisky-and-seltzer," replied the Colonel, heartily.

"I don't think I can spare the time," said the detective, quietly.

"Nonsense, man! You must drink the health of my future son-in-law!" he declared.

"Most certainly," remarked Forrest. "I can find time for that, even though——" He paused, and then said, with quiet incisiveness, "Even though the Motor Pirate is upon the road again!"

CHAPTER XV

A CLUE AT LAST

IMMEDIATELY Forrest had made his dramatic announcement, I glanced at Evie, for in view of the apprehension she had exhibited earlier in the evening, I was just a little doubtful as to whether she would take kindly to the renewal of my attempts to catch the Pirate. To my satisfaction, she exhibited no signs of trepidation, if she did not appear altogether delighted that I was to have another opportunity of distinguishing myself. In fact as soon as the detective had followed Colonel Maitland from the room, she told me that she was glad.

"I don't fear for you a scrap, Jim. At least not much," she said. "I know you won't do anything foolish, for my sake."

I interrupted with, "Nor for my **own.**"

"And do you know," she continued, "I have a queer sort of impression that when the Pirate is captured, this horrible depression which has been hanging over me will disappear altogether."

"Then captured he must be without delay," I said.

"Though I don't see how Mannering will be affected thereby."

"I am not so sure about that," said Evie.

"You surely cannot think that Mannering is in any way connected with the Motor Pirate?" I inquired in surprise, for any such idea had long passed from my mind.

"I don't know," she remarked dreamily; "I don't know. But I should not be surprised. I really could believe anything about him."

I reminded her of the steps Forrest had taken to assure himself that there were no grounds for such a suspicion, but she was not convinced; so I forbore to continue the discussion, changing the conversation to the arrangements to be made for her proposed visit to Norfolk. It was decided that I should write at once to my aunt, and that she should be ready to start the moment I received a reply. We had settled all the preliminaries by the time the Colonel and Forrest returned, and I bade her good night, feeling quite easy in my mind.

"I am delighted to be able to congratulate you," said Forrest, the moment we were outside.

"I am the luckiest man in the world," I replied.

"You are," returned the detective, emphatically. "All the same, I should not have been sorry if Miss Maitland had stuck to her intention of refusing to listen to you until after the capture of the Pirate."

"Why?" I demanded.

"For purely selfish reasons," he replied. "I take it you will not be so keen on the chase. Men in your position don't take risks."

I held out my hand to him. "Put your fist in that," I said. "What I have promised, I stick to; and, to tell the truth, I was never keener on anything in my life."

"That's good news for me," he answered, and I could tell from his tone that he meant it. Besides, he was not a man given to the paying of idle compliments.

We were walking quietly towards my cottage as we talked, and the impulse came upon me to confide to him the presentiment which Evie had in regard to the capture of the Pirate relieving her from her burden of fear. That necessitated my explaining as well as I could the curious influence which Mannering exercised over her. Forrest listened attentively.

"Curious," he muttered, when I had finished. "It is very curious that the fellow should have produced such an impression on Miss Maitland. By the way, he was not at the Colonel's to-night."

"No," I replied.

"I wonder——" he began. He never finished the sentence, nor did he speak again until he reached my door. There he paused, and said lightly, "I think I should like to discover whether the disappointed lover is at home to-night. Are you prepared for a little amateur burglary, Sutgrove?"

"Ready for anything," I assured him.

"It seems a little absurd to suspect Mannering," he remarked meditatively. "Yet there are times when a woman's intuition is a better guide than a man's ratiocination."

"You didn't get any clue in Amsterdam, then?" I asked tentatively, for I was curious to hear the results of his journey.

"No, no. Nothing at all in Holland."

"If Mannering were the Pirate, and had tried to dispose of his plunder there, you would in all probability have caught him; but he would scarcely have chosen to go abroad at the same time as yourself," I remarked.

Forrest emitted a long, low whistle. "By Jove!" he said. "Then it was indeed he whom I saw in Vienna."

"In Vienna?" I queried.

"When did he leave England?" asked the detective, ignoring my question.

"The very day you left," I replied promptly.

"Come, this is getting interesting," he said. "To-night we will most certainly let the Pirate do his worst on the roads. We will look for a clue to the mystery of his identity nearer home." He looked at his watch. "It's a little too early to pay our call, so if you don't mind, I will come in and we can discuss the matter at leisure."

To say that Forrest's enigmatic utterances filled me with excitement, very inadequately expresses the state of my mind. He followed me indoors, and, while I

mixed a drink for each of us, he saw that the windows and doors were closed. Then seating himself in an easy chair, he selected a cigar and remarked—

"Now we can talk."

"I thought you only intended to go to Amsterdam," I began.

"That was my intention," he replied. "But before giving you the results of my inquiries—it won't take long, by the way—I should like to ask you one or two questions, if I may?"

"Fire away," I said.

"Did you mention to any one where I had gone?"

"Not to a soul. At least certainly not at the time, though I have probably mentioned the matter to Miss Maitland since."

"Oh, you young lovers!" he interjected.

"She would not speak of the matter, I know. I gave out to every one else that you had been recalled to London."

"Anyway, it would not have mattered if she had, as Mannering left on the same day as myself. Where did he say he was going?"

"He said he was bound for Paris on business connected with some patents he was applying for. He told us he would be absent for two or three days; and as a matter of fact, he was away for ten."

"That would about fit in," remarked the detective, after a moment's thought. "But of that you shall judge for yourself." He moistened his lips and pulled at his

cigar until it was well alight, and then he commenced his story.

"I carried out my original intention, and the night after I left you I caught the 8.30 at Liverpool Street. The next morning I was in Amsterdam. I stayed there three days, until I was quite convinced that no such parcel of diamonds as had been stolen had been offered for sale to any of the Dutch dealers. I could not have failed to hear of it if any such attempt had been made. While there I had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of a Russian agent, whose work I fancy must have been largely political. Ivan Stroviloff his name was, and he had acquaintances in most European capitals. I discussed the matter with him. He thought that an attempt to dispose of the stones was much more likely to be made in Vienna or St. Petersburg than anywhere else except Paris. I was aware of our agents in Paris having been fully informed, and I knew it was not worth my while to go there; but beyond notifying the Austrian police, I doubted whether any steps had been taken in regard to Vienna, so I determined to proceed to the Austrian capital. Stroviloff proved a very decent fellow, rather an exception to the general run, for I don't take to those Russian agents as a rule; and as I was able to give him a few hints and some introductions over here—he was going on to London—he gave me in return letters to some of his colleagues in Vienna and Petersburg, thinking they would probably be of more use to me than application through the usual

official channels. Well, I went on to Vienna. I won't weary you with a history of my fruitless inquiries, it would take far too much time. Anyhow, I did find eventually that a parcel of diamonds had been disposed of there, and, as Stroviloff had predicted, I obtained the information through one of the Russian agents and not through the Viennese police. I will say that I do not see how the latter could have helped me, for the purchaser was the representative of a Petersburg house who happened to be in Vienna for the purpose of attending the sale of the Princess Novikoff's jewels—you probably saw all about it in the papers."

It was a remarkable sale, and the extraordinary prices realized are probably fresh in most people's memories. I told Forrest I had seen accounts of it, and he continued.

"Unfortunately I did not get the information until after the representative in question had returned to Petersburg. There was nothing left for me to do but to follow him there if I wanted to satisfy myself as to whether the stones of which I had heard were really the ones stolen from the mail. It was rather like a wild goose chase, but I went. It was the day before I started that I saw the man who reminded me so forcibly of your friend Mannering. It was a very fleeting glimpse of a face which looked in at the door of a restaurant where I happened to be dining, and I should not like to swear that it was he whom I saw. At the time, I put my fancy down to one of those casual likenesses which

sometimes lead even keen observers to accost total strangers in the streets as acquaintances. The likeness was, however, undeniable, in spite of something strange about his appearance. However, I paid no attention to the incident, and the next morning I was on my way to Petersburg. There I found no difficulty in obtaining full particulars from the dealer. I have no doubt but that he has purchased the stones which were stolen from the Brighton mail. In size, weight, and quality they answered to the description perfectly. I learned from him that the man from whom he had bought the stones had been introduced to him by a well-known Viennese jeweller. The price asked, though not very greatly below market value, was low enough to tempt him to purchase. The man who offered them suggested that payment should be made, not to himself, but to his firm in Amsterdam. The transaction seemed in every way *bonâ fide*, the explanation as to the low price being that the Amsterdam firm was rather pressed for cash, and so compelled to realize some of its stock, but was unable to do so in Amsterdam for fear of jeopardizing its credit. The man who sold the stones gave the name of Josef Hoffman, and the merchant produced his card which bore the name of Jacob Meyer and Meyer, and an address in the De Jordaan, Amsterdam. He was described to me as a tall, powerful, fresh-coloured, fair-haired German, of pleasant manners and address. The Petersburg merchant's representative had given him a draft on an Amsterdam bank and, on reaching the

Russian capital, after examining the stones, his employer had authorized the payment of the draft by telegraph.

"As soon as I obtained these particulars, I started once more for the Dutch city without wasting much time. Needless to say, I was too late to catch my man. The office in the De Jordaan I found to be a room which had been taken for a week or two, and then vacated, by a person whom I easily identified as the fair-haired German. The draft had been exchanged for a draft on the banker's London agents by the same man. I came on to London immediately, but Hoffman, or whatever his name may be, was a week ahead of me. I traced him to the London bank where he had cashed his draft. He did it in the coolest manner imaginable. He left it one day saying that he required gold, and that if they would get the amount ready—it was over £4000—he would call for it the next day. He actually allowed two days to elapse before doing so. Then he came in a cab with a handbag and took away the gold. That at present is as far as I have got. I only learned the last of these particulars this afternoon, and of course I went at once to the Yard to make my report and to arrange for the circulation of the description of the fair-haired German throughout the country. Then I came on to you."

Forrest finished his drink and stood up. "Now you know as much about the case as I do," he remarked, "and I fancy it is about time for us to pay our proposed visit to our friend Mannering."

"I don't see how you can connect him in any way with Hoffman," I said, as I rose from my seat.

Forrest smiled. "I omitted to tell you one thing," he observed. "I could not see the hair of the man in Vienna whose face seemed familiar to me. But one thing I did remark. The man with Mannering's face wore a fair moustache."

"But Mannering's is dark," I argued. "It was dark when he went away and dark when he returned."

Forrest held up his hand mockingly. "In these days of scientific progress nothing is easier than for the intelligent leopard to change his spots. Ask the brunette when fashion decrees that fair hair is to be worn, and ask again of the blonde how she manages when the exigencies demand raven tresses."

That settled me. "There's only one thing more," I said. "When did you hear that the Motor Pirate was at work again?"

"At St. Albans. I called at the police office on my way here. He was seen about ten o'clock this side of Peterborough and going north."

"It will be rather a sell if Mannering is at home," I remarked.

"He will not be at home," replied Forrest with conviction.

CHAPTER XVI

I COMMIT A BURGLARY

The night was moonless, but there was that soft diffused light in the air invariable in June, except on the cloudiest of evenings. There was just enough of it to enable us to see our way as we strolled towards Mannering's house. When we reached it everything appeared still. All the windows were dark. I felt my heart beginning to beat faster than ordinarily as Forrest lifted the latch of the gate opening on to the strip of garden, which lay between the road and the house. We walked along the turf edging of the path in order that our feet might not crunch upon the gravel. Forrest was first. He went straight to the front door and tried it. It was fast.

"We will try one of those French windows," he whispered after returning to my side.

The house was a two-story cottage with a verandah opening on the south side facing a lawn. On to this verandah windows opened from both the dining and sitting-rooms, the servants' quarters being on the other side of the house.

We went round the angle of the building and tried

the first window. It was fastened. With cat-like tread Forrest glided on to the second. It was one of the two giving entrance to the sitting-room. A sibilant sound from the detective's lips took me to his side. Without hesitating a second, he threw back the casement and stepped into the darkness.

"Come," he muttered, and I followed.

Heavy curtains veiled the windows and past these the darkness was thick enough to be felt. Of a sudden there was a crack which made me start. It was only Forrest striking a match. With imperturbable confidence, he stepped towards a table and lit the lamp which stood thereon. I felt exceedingly uncomfortable, but Forrest obviously knew no such qualms, for he at once proceeded to examine every object in the room. So far as I could see, there was nothing at all unusual about the place. The room was in exactly the same condition as I had observed it hundreds of times before when I had dropped in for a smoke and a chat. On the table, beside the lamp, was a tantalus and a glass, and a half empty syphon. The glass had been used and the ash on the floor, beside an armchair, showed that a cigar had accompanied the drink. A pair of slippers lay on the hearth rug as if they had been carelessly kicked off. Forrest pointed to them.

"Mannering is not at home," he said. "If he had gone to bed, these would not be here."

"I hope he will not return while we are about," I muttered.

"It would be a little awkward for him," said Forrest.

calmly. "I should be compelled to arrest him in self-defence, and I am not prepared to do so at present."

He did not, however, hurry his movements in any way as he proceeded to deliberately search the room. Only once did he pause, and that was when he discovered a continental time-table of recent date. He brought the book to the light and turned over the pages carefully. A gleam of exultation crossed his face, as he pointed out to me a trace of tobacco ash between the pages which gave details of the train service between Vienna and Amsterdam.

"We are on the right track," he observed.

But that one slight piece of evidence was all that the most careful examination of the room revealed, although there was not a drawer nor a shelf which he did not overhaul.

"We must try his bedroom," he remarked, when he had finished with the sitting-room.

"What about the servants?" I asked.

"If they are not asleep, they will merely imagine that it is their master going to bed," he replied, as taking a candlestick, which stood on an occasional table near the door, he passed out of the room. I followed him upstairs, with my heart in my mouth, and pointed out to him the door of the room which Mannering occupied. As Forrest turned the handle and entered, I was quite prepared to make a bolt for it. I should not have been a bit surprised to have discovered our suspect sleeping quietly within. But Forrest turned and beckoned me to enter. The room was empty, and this time I assisted the detective in his

search. Between us we subjected the bedroom and the adjoining dressing-room to the closest scrutiny, but without result. We could not, unfortunately, make an exhaustive examination, for there were one or two ancient presses which were locked, and the Chubb safe let into the wall by the bed head was likewise fastened.

The detective shrugged his shoulders when we had done.

"As we haven't a burglar's outfit, we shall have to wait until we have a search warrant," he muttered.

With a disappointed air he led the way out of the room. On the landing he paused. His keen gaze had rested for a moment on a travelling bag which stood under a table. There were the remains of a number of labels upon it and he scanned them carefully. There was not sufficient of any one of them left for identification.

"He's a clever devil," he whispered.

Then he opened the bag and again his countenance lightened. Inside was an empty bottle bearing the label of a London chemist, with the additional superscription "Peroxide of Hydrogen."

"The fair hair is accounted for," commented Forrest. "And as for the dye which would restore his locks to their natural colour, I presume he has it under lock and key."

He slipped the bottle into his pocket and returned downstairs, I following at his heels.

"There's not enough at present against him to warrant his arrest," he said, when we were again in the sitting-room.

"Then why not have a look round his workshops," I suggested.

"His what?" queried Forrest, eagerly.

"Haven't I ever mentioned them to you? Haven't you ever heard that Mannering spends all his spare time in experimental motor construction?" I asked in surprise.

"I think I have heard it mentioned, but until this moment I have always thought it was chaff," he replied.

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated.

"I should have been inside that shop a couple of months ago," he continued, "if I had thought—— Whereabouts is the shop?"

"Just at the back of the house and abutting on the side of the road," I explained. "The old coach-house and stables." Then as the thought occurred to me, I continued, "Why I heard him tell you of his work himself."

"That's precisely the reason why I paid no attention to it," said my companion. "Can you take me to the place?"

I led the way through the French window, Forrest putting out the light before he followed me, and carefully closing the casement behind him as he stepped on to the verandah. A clock, somewhere in St. Albans, struck the half after two as we crossed the lawn in the direction of the workshop.

"We have only a short time at our disposal," whispered Forrest. "The darkness is lifting, and our friend will soon be returning."

We passed through a side door, which we found

unlocked, into what had once been the stable-yard. But we could get no further. The two doors which gave admission to the building were firmly fastened, and there was no available window by which we might gain entrance. We retraced our steps, and, passing out of the door, approached the stables from the road. By this time the dawn had made such progress that we knew our chances of getting inside before Mannering's return were dwindling rapidly. We found no more likelihood of obtaining admission from this side than the other.

"I cannot arrest a man on the evidence of a few grains of tobacco dust, and an empty phial," declared Forrest, savagely, as he shook the tightly locked door.

"Listen!" I said.

Borne on the wind came the throb of a motor. So still was the air that when the sound first reached our ears it must have been a mile away. The sound drew nearer and nearer, and while it was still a quarter of a mile distant, I recognized the familiar noise of Mannering's car, a sound as dissimilar to the hum of the Pirate car as it was possible to conceive.

"Forrest," I cried, turning to my companion, "we must be mad to think that Mannering could play the part of the Motor Pirate on that old car of his."

There was something so irresistibly ludicrous in the idea, that we both indulged in a hearty fit of laughter, and with one accord we turned and walked down the road.

"He may keep his fast car elsewhere," remarked the detective, when his mirth had subsided.

"It would be difficult to bring the guilt home to him if we failed to discover the car," I replied.

A few seconds later we met the man whom we had so lately suspected. I felt a tinge of shame at the thought that, a few minutes previously, I had been sneaking into his house in the hope that I should find evidence to convict him of a crime. By this time dawn was sufficiently advanced to allow of recognition, and as he came level with us Mannering pulled up.

"Hullo, Sutgrove!" he shouted. "You're about betimes. Been on the same job as myself?"

"What's that, Mr. Mannering?" asked Forrest.

"Looking for an opportunity to pay back this little debt," was the light answer, as the speaker tapped his shoulder gently.

"Any luck?" said Forrest, dryly.

"Not a scrap," was the ready reply. "You see I'm a bit handicapped with this old car, for unless the fellow happens to take the same road as myself, there's precious little chance of my picking him up. Still, if you do not soon succeed in catching him, I think I shall have a good try myself."

"I suppose by that you know who he is," I remarked, more in order to see what he would say than in the hope of eliciting anything.

"Not the slightest idea on the subject," he responded promptly. "I am merely hoping that in a few days I shall be in possession of a new motor from which even the Pirate will be unable to escape."

I made a gesture of surprise.

"Fact," he continued. "My experiments have proved successful at last. In a week I shall have delivered to me the new motor I have designed, and then the Pirate had better look out. Good night."

Waving an adieu, he set his car in motion, and jogged along until he reached the door of his coach-house. We watched him dismount, unlock the door, and disappear inside.

"It beats me," remarked Forrest.

"Surely you do not still harbour any suspicion concerning him?" I inquired in amazement.

Forrest made no reply. His head was bent, his brow knitted deeply, his hands clasped behind him as we turned and walked back to my place. He did not speak until we stopped on my doorstep.

"I wish he had not seen us," my companion then remarked. "He will be bound to tumble to the conclusion that we suspect him, and will be on his guard."

"Then you do still suspect him," I cried again.

"If I had one scrap of direct evidence," replied the detective, emphatically, "I would have him under arrest within half an hour. Only one little scrap," he almost groaned. "But, as it is, my reputation would not survive if I made a mistake."

"Why, you don't imagine that he would go so far as to shoot himself just to avert suspicion," I asked, still incredulous.

Forrest drew himself up smartly. "Good Lord!

What a fool I am! What—a—blind—dunderheaded—jackass!" he cried.

"What's the matter now?" I inquired smiling, for the detective was groping in his pockets. "Have you lost anything?"

From his waistcoat pocket he produced a small leaden bullet, and he held it outstretched in the palm of his hand.

"Here have I been wasting weeks on the continent, while with this I might have settled the matter once and for all."

"How?" I asked.

"I needed but to compare this with the bullet the surgeon extracted from Mannering's shoulder. This is the one which killed the poor fellow near Towcester. If Mannering's bullet is identical with this, I should have nothing more to say; but," he continued meaningly, "both your revolver and mine are of a different calibre to the weapon which fired this. If the bullet which hit Mannering should prove to fit either of our weapons, there would be no need to seek for further evidence. I must see that surgeon at once."

He started off rapidly down the garden path. I hurried after him and laid my hand on his arm.

"Steady, old man," I remarked. "You can hardly knock up a hardworked medical man at 3.30 a.m. just to ask him a question."

Forrest stopped and gave a short laugh. "Upon my word, I had entirely forgotten what the time was. No,

you are quite right. There is no need for such excessive hurry. Mannering is safe enough for the present."

"At least, for the next eighteen hours," I observed, after glancing at my watch. "Meanwhile, your room has been kept ready for you."

"A little sleep will not come amiss," he answered, yawning; "though it seems almost a pity to go to bed on such a morning."

He was right. By this time dawn was breaking with a splendour I have never seen equalled before nor since. From east to west the sky was stained and flecked with crimson and gold, and our faces glowed ruddily in the reflected light. We both fell to silence, as with our faces to the east we watched the uprising of the sun; and, until the sky paled as the sun made its appearance above the line of the horizon, we did not stir.

Then Forrest drew a deep breath. "There's been the beauty of destruction in the sunrise," he remarked. "We shall have a storm before nightfall."

He followed me indoors, and, leaving him at the door of his room, I went to my own. I got into my pyjamas, but I did not feel inclined to sleep for the sunbeams were glancing in at my window, and all about were the sound and movement of the awakening earth-creatures. I wheeled an easy chair to the window, and wrapping a blanket about me, took a novel I had been reading and strove to fix my attention on the pages. I could not do so. Whether it was the reflex action of the brain from the excitement of the evening or not, but the fact was

I felt unaccountably depressed. I fought against the feeling as best I could. But I could not get out of my head the idea that some great danger was threatening, not myself, but the one dearest to me in the world. From my window I could see her home, and I drew the chair into a position where my eyes might rest upon the roof which sheltered her. There was some consolation in this, and I watched until I eventually fell into an uneasy slumber, from which I awakened unrefreshed and ill at ease.

CHAPTER XVII

STORM

My tub pulled me together to some extent, but I still felt restless when I went downstairs. Forrest had already gone out, leaving word that he expected to be back to breakfast at the usual hour. I went into the garden, but the sun was shining in a cloudless sky and there was not a breath of air stirring. It was insufferably hot and I was glad to return into the shade of the house.

The detective came in panting, a little later, with disappointment plainly written in his face.

"The surgeon out?" I inquired.

"No," he answered. "But he was not much use though. Mannering kept the bullet. He wanted to retain it, so he said, as a memento of his adventure."

"Perfectly natural," I commented.

"Perfectly," returned Forrest. "The unfortunate result is, that his doing so prevents me from dismissing the possibility of his being the Pirate from my mind. And I ought to be doing something. Last night the rascal seems to have been everywhere. Apparently he

was actuated with a desire to destroy everything which stood in his path. One would judge him to have become absolutely reckless. Instead of avoiding the towns, he courted observation by passing through them. This morning at the police office, I heard particulars of at least half a dozen cases of unoffending people being ruthlessly ridden down, and Heaven only knows how many more there may be of which the details are not yet to hand. The sheer devilry of his progress is simply amazing. What it comes to is this, Sutgrove. If I can't get hold of him within the next week I may as well resign the force at once. If I don't resign I shall be dismissed, and quite deservedly."

I tried to say something consolatory, but he would not hear me; and it was not until after he had made a savage attack upon the eggs and rashers and had swallowed three cups of tea, that his usual equanimity returned.

"What's the next move?" I asked, when breakfast was done.

"I am going to town to see if I can identify the purchaser of this bottle," he replied, holding up the phial he had taken from the bag in Mannering's house the night before; "and to inquire whether anything more has been heard of the fair-haired German."

"Then I can be of no assistance to you, to-day?" I said.

"None whatever beyond remaining here and keeping an eye upon our friend. I shall ask for another man

to-day to assist in shadowing him, but until his arrival I should be glad for some one to keep me acquainted with his movements. If, as I presume you will, you go over to Colonel Maitland's, you cannot help seeing whether he leaves his house."

I promised to do as he wished, and shortly after he had gone, I took my hat and strolled over to the Colonel's place.

Evie appeared to have quite recovered from her fears of the previous evening, and being busily engaged upon domestic duties, she sent me to join her father under the shade of a big tree on the lawn. There solaced by an iced lemon squash and the newspaper, I managed to pass the morning very comfortably. Mannering gave no sign of existence.

I took myself home for lunch, remembering letters I had to write. I felt much easier in mind, and made a hearty meal in consequence. The result was that I fell asleep over my cigar afterwards.

I awoke suddenly, wondering where I was. Then I thought I must have slept for hours, for a blackness only one degree less than that of night brooded over the earth. I took out my watch lazily, and was surprised to see that the hands only pointed to five. I sat still for a minute or two striving to collect my thoughts, for my head was heavy. I held my watch to my ear. It had not stopped. I jumped up and walked to the window, and I saw at once the reason why I had imagined that night had fallen. From east to west and from north to

south a dense pall of cloud hung over the earth. Not a leaf moved, and except for the shrill chirp of a grasshopper, not a sound broke the uncanny stillness.

"By Jove!" I muttered, "we are going to have it hot."

There came upon me an intense desire to be near Evie during the progress of the storm which threatened every moment to break. I did not wait to analyse the feeling, but catching up my hat I bolted straight out of the window. I had only a couple of hundred yards to traverse, but when I reached the Colonel's house, so hot and heavy was the air, that I was soaked from head to foot in perspiration. I paused at the gate to wipe my brow with my handkerchief, and at the moment the storm broke. I heard the crackle of the lightning as it slid from the sky, and the thunder clap followed so swiftly that for a moment I felt deafened. I waited no longer, but raced across the lawn and into the open French window of the drawing-room. The apartment was unoccupied, so I passed through into the hall. That was vacant too, and I continued my search through the morning-room to the Colonel's sanctum. There I saw the genial warrior standing at the window, and watching the play of the lightning with every appearance of interest.

"Hullo, Colonel!" I said. "Where's Evie?"

"Isn't she in the drawing-room? She was there twenty minutes ago," he replied.

"She is not there now, I have just come through," I explained.

"Then I fancy she will be in all probability in her bedroom with her head under the sheets," he said, chuckling.

"At all events I will send one of the maids to see," I said.

I rang the bell, and after giving a message to the maid who answered the summons, I joined the Colonel at the window. He appeared to be very pleased with the progress the storm was making.

"Thank goodness this will clear the air," he explained, as a reason for his satisfaction. "It was so hot that I could take no lunch but a mayonnaise, iced strawberries, and a glass of hock. Don't you think the air is cooler already? I begin to feel quite an appetite for dinner. My only fear is that, if the thunder has not turned everything sour, it will have frightened my cook out of her senses, and there will be nothing to appease my appetite."

The window at which we were standing faced towards Mannering's house. There was a stretch of lawn outside and, beyond, a thicket of shrubs and small trees between the grounds of the two residences. I was glancing in the direction of these, when I thought I saw something white moving in the shrubbery. I was about to say something to the Colonel when a crash of thunder drowned the utterance. At the next flash of lightning, I perceived that my eyes had not deceived me, and in an instant I jumped to the conclusion that it was Evie who was out there in the storm. Without a moment's

hesitation I vaulted through the window and raced across the lawn. The Colonel must have thought me mad.

It was something of a shock for me to find that I was right in my conjecture. There, huddled up under the spreading branches of a cedar, stood my darling, her eyes wide open, her cheeks blanched with terror.

"Why, Evie, dear heart! What is the matter?" I cried.

At the sound of my voice she started, and, with a little cry of delight, she threw herself into my arms.

"I knew you would come—I knew you would come!" she sobbed hysterically.

The cedar under which she was standing was close to the hedge, and I fancied, as she spoke, that I saw a figure move away from the other side of the hedge. I could not verify my suspicion, for Evie needed all my attention. She had fainted. Catching her up, I bore her across the lawn to the house.

It was some time before she came to herself, and then, at her own request, I left her with her maid and returned to the Colonel. Needless to say I was very much worried in my mind. Why Evie should have been sheltering in the shrubbery from the storm, with the house so near, seemed unexplainable, and I awaited with anxiety the time when I could learn the reason from her own lips. The presence of the figure—the figure of a man—on the opposite side of the hedge, was also inexplicable. I should have guessed it to be Mannering, but I would have staked my life upon Evie's truthfulness

when she had told me how much she had learned to detest him. Besides, her delight was obvious when I arrived on the scene.

Not until the evening, however, did I get a chance of speaking to Evie again. The Colonel and I dined alone, Evie sending word to say that the storm had left her with a headache, and that she would join us later. I was so silent during the meal that my host grew quite merry at my expense.

"Wait till you are married, my boy," he remarked. "There will come times when you will be grateful for these feminine headaches."

I hate cheap witticisms of this sort, but I could hardly resent them from the Colonel as I could have done had they fallen from any one else's lips; but I fancy he saw at last that they were distasteful to me, for after a while he forebore to comment upon my dour looks.

About ten Evie came downstairs. By this time the storm had passed away entirely, and the air was deliciously fresh and cool after the rain. It was a strangely subdued girl who came nervously to me, and shrank away from me as I kissed her.

"No, Jim, no! You mustn't do that," she said.

Colonel Maitland had slipped away upon his daughter's entrance, and we were alone.

"Why, darling, what ails you?" I asked.

"Nothing—nothing. Oh! don't ask me," she almost wailed in reply.

I put my arm about her waist, and drew her down

beside me to a seat on a big Chesterfield drawn before one of the windows. She resisted faintly at first, but presently I heard her give a sigh of content, and felt her nestle towards me. Then I spoke.

"Tell me, dear, what possessed you to go out into the storm?"

"I don't know," she murmured—"I don't know. I—I felt that I must. I didn't think it was going to break so soon, and then the first flash of lightning and the voice of the thunder! It was like judgment day."

"It is all passed and over," I remarked, with a man's clumsy attempt at consolation.

"I wish it were—I wish it were," she repeated, with an indrawn sigh.

"It is all over hours ago," I said.

She broke away from me passionately. "Oh! Jim, you don't know," she cried.

"I don't know what?" I inquired, as I attempted to draw her to me again.

She pushed my hands away with a gesture of despair. Then with an effort she rose to her feet, and looking at me straight in the face, she said—

"Jim, this must not go on. It is more than I can bear."

I rose to my feet too, my heart beating wildly. "I don't understand you," I answered, though I comprehended her meaning only too well. "What must not go on?"

"Our—our engagement," she faltered. She was white to the lips as she said the words.

I staggered back under the blow, then leaning forward I sought to take her hand.

"No, Jim, no!" she said. "It's no use; I can never be yours. It is impossible—quite impossible. My love would be fatal to you! I know it will! He said so."

"He?" I asked.

She faltered. "Oh! I cannot help believing him. He tells me that I am to be his." She shuddered. "Jim, you must leave me, and never see me again. I cannot have your—your blood on my hands."

She held out her slender white fingers, and I saw that the ring which I had placed there had been removed. Though my brain was awhirl, I tried my utmost to be calm. I think the effort was successful, and that my voice was fairly even when I said—

"Come, darling, a promise is a promise, and my own little girl is not going to break her promise because of the threats of a jealous rival."

She shuddered from head to foot. "You don't know him as I know him," she murmured. "He would stick at nothing, Jim. I don't think he is a man; he must be a devil. He can do things no man ever thought of doing."

"You exaggerate his capacities for evil," I said, as equably as I was able, for her agitation was so great that I feared for her reason. "What has Mannering been saying to you, for it was he whom I saw behind the

hedge when I brought you out of the storm, I suppose?"

"You saw him?" she queried. "Then it is true. I have been hoping you would tell me I had been dreaming again."

"I saw nothing very terrible about him," I remarked.

"You don't know him," she said again.

"He will have cause to know me before many hours have passed," I declared savagely.

She clung to me in terror. "No, Jim. You must not go near him. You do not know the power he exercises. This afternoon I was sitting thinking of you when I became conscious that he was telling me to come to him. There was no reason why I should have thought so. He was not in sight, but I was bound to go."

"And you found him waiting for you?" I asked quietly, though my brain was aflame, for I was determined to ascertain all that had passed between them.

"He was waiting for me," she repeated—"waiting for me and the storm. That must have come at his bidding too. It was horrible waiting for him to speak—horrible! I tried to ask him what he wanted, but my tongue was tied. Not until after the first peal of thunder did he utter a word. Then he told me the time was nearly at hand when he should come for me." I clenched my fists involuntarily, but I did not interrupt my darling's story. "I begged of him to leave me free. He paid no heed. 'I am going away,' he said. 'For three days you will see nothing of me, though all England will be

talking of my deeds. On the third I shall return. Mind you are ready.'"

"Did you not mention me?" I remarked weakly. I hardly knew what to say, for it seemed to me that either Evie must be the victim of some extraordinary hallucination, or else that Mannering was mad.

"He mentioned you," she replied. "'Tell Sutgrove,' he said, 'that he has three days in which to capture the Motor Pirate and make sure of his bride. After that he will be too late. Tell him, too, that death waits on the fool who fails.'"

"It's a sporting challenge," I muttered, for I had no doubt now in my mind that Mannering and the Pirate were identical.

My words did not reach Evie's ear, for she continued,

"Now you know why I have put away your ring. He is too strong for us. I must do as he bids me. I——"

I interrupted her sharply. "Have you everything packed to go away on your visit to Norfolk to-morrow?" I asked.

The tone of my voice roused her. She looked at me wildly.

"Why—why——" she said. Then the expression faded out of her face. For the second time that day she had fainted.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH THE PIRATE APPEARS IN A FROLICSOME HUMOUR

The fainting fit which terminated my conversation with Evie alarmed me tremendously, and as soon as I could summon assistance I sent for a doctor. She came round before the medical man arrived, but I did not revert to the topic which had agitated her. Indeed, she appeared listless and disinclined to say a word on any subject. Colonel Maitland was less worried than myself, but even he was anxious until after the doctor had seen her and assured him that his daughter was merely suffering from over excitement, and that a sedative and a good night's rest would probably restore her completely.

I was not so sure that such would be the case, and when she had retired I thought it well to take the Colonel into his study and give him as full an account as I could of all that had led up to the fainting fit. He listened to my story with attention, and when I had done, though I could plainly see that he thought his daughter's fears were due to her own morbid fancy, yet he agreed with me that it would be well that she should have a change of scene at the earliest possible moment.

After arriving at this decision I determined to at once seek out Mannering, and demand from him some explanation of his conduct, for I could not conceive that Evie's story was entirely the outcome of her imagination. It was a delicate subject to discuss, yet I did not hesitate. I was in no humour to mince matters. My anger, though I had kept it well under control hitherto, only needed the slightest fanning to bring it to a white heat, and I longed whole-heartedly that Mannering would afford me some excuse for giving physical expression to my feelings.

I walked up to his front door, and knocked in a manner to denote with sufficient distinctiveness that the mood of the knocker was the imperative. I could see by the lights within that the inmates of the house had not retired to rest, but I had to repeat my summons before there was any response. Then I heard footsteps within, and the door opening an inch or two, a voice inquired who was there.

"Is Mr. Mannering in?" I demanded.

"Mr. Sutgrove, is it?" replied the voice, and upon my answering in the affirmative, the door was thrown open, and I saw the two maidservants standing in the hall.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the parlourmaid. "We didn't expect any one at this time of night."

"That's all right," I answered. "Can I see Mr. Mannering?"

"He's gone away for a day or two, sir," said the girl.

"That's very sudden, isn't it?" I asked. "I saw him this afternoon."

"Yes, sir. He said nothing about it to us until after dinner. Then he packed his handbag and went away on his motor."

"It's a confounded nuisance," I remarked. "I wanted to see him on important business. Did he say where he was going?"

"He said Cromer, sir, but he did not leave any address. Then, after a momentary hesitation, she added, "Is—is anything wrong?"

I looked at her keenly. She dropped her eyes, and I could see there was something on her mind.

"What makes you ask?" I enquired.

"I—I don't know," she replied, with obvious embarrassment.

"There must be something or you would not have asked," I said encouragingly. "Come—out with it."

She still hesitated, but the housemaid was bolder. "I'll tell the gentleman if you don't, Sarah," she declared. "It's like this, sir," she rattled out volubly: "the master, Mr. Mannering that is, has been so queer in his ways lately that Sarah and me 'as been quite scared. Not that he 'asn't been quite the gentleman. He always was that, wasn't he, Sarah? But he's been that restless and bound up in himself lately—walking up and down in his room and talking to himself. He always was one to shut himself up in that nasty old coach-house with his experiments and things, but he was quiet, and we

never took no account of it. But lately he's been different."

"How?" I asked.

"Well, instead of going to bed like a Christian he's up all hours of the night. It ain't only that. He slips out as if he didn't want us to see him, and when we've known he hasn't been at home we've found he's taken the trouble to tumble the bed to make it appear as how he slept in it."

"Pooh!" I remarked. "If that's all, my servants would probably say the same about me. You need not be alarmed about such trifles."

"But it's not all," said Sarah, taking up the story. "The nights he goes out are just the nights the Pirate makes his appearance."

"Those are just the nights I am away from home," I said.

"But you have the detective gentleman with you," argued the girl, "and when you come back I warrant you do not bring diamond studs back with you that don't belong to you."

"What!" I cried. "What!"

"It's truth, sir," said the housemaid. "A week ago, just after he came back from Paris, I was sweeping the floor of his bedroom, when I sweeps up a diamond stud. Now, I knew he never had such a thing——"

"I suppose you know exactly what jewellery he has?" I interrupted, laughing.

"He always was a very careless gentleman until the

last month, before which he left his things lying about all over the place, but then he had a safe put in his bedroom, and he never so much as left the key lying about. However, I mentions the stud to Sarah, and we talks it over and puts two and two together, and Sarah thinks that if he doesn't ask what has become of it, it might be as well as if we told the detective gentleman about it."

"Quite right," I remarked. "You might let me look at the stud, though."

After a little pressing the girls fetched the trinket, and I perceived that it very closely resembled the stud Winter had worn on the night of our first encounter with the Pirate. I said nothing about this supposition to the maids, but bidding them to be careful not to mention the matter to any one until they had seen Forrest, whom I promised should call upon them, I left the house.

Though disappointed in my original intention of forcing an explanation from Mannering, I was by no means ill pleased with the result of my visit to his house. My suspicions as to his identity with the Pirate had become considerably stronger, and once that identity was established I fancied I should have little difficulty in preventing any further annoyance at his hands.

Yet when I came to think calmly upon the subject I could not fail to see how frail was the foundation upon which my suspicions were built up. The fancies of a girl, the suspicions of a couple of gossiping servants, and the discovery of a stud, which might or might not

prove to be the one which had been stolen from Winter. I longed for Forrest to return, for I felt utterly incapable of resting, and as he had not put in an appearance by midnight, I got out my car and went into St. Albans to meet him. At the police station there was no news of him to be obtained, but I did learn that the Pirate had been seen, his presence having been reported from the vicinity of Bedford.

Knowing that it would be impossible for me to sleep until I had seen Forrest; knowing, too, how unlikely it was that he would now return to St. Albans before morning, I thought I might at least have one shot on my own account of bringing off the capture I so ardently desired. So, in case of an untoward accident happening, I scribbled a note to the detective, telling him briefly what I had heard from the servants, and my intentions; and making sure that my revolver was in working order, I bade my friends at the police-station good night, and departed.

I knew it would be useless to take the direct road to Bedford if I wished to meet the Pirate, and, as he had been reported going east, I took the route through Hertford, trusting that I might be able to cut him off upon his return. I gleaned nothing concerning him at either Hertford or Ware, and was so doubtful of proceeding further in that direction that I left it to the arbitrament of a coin to determine whether I should go on by a road with which I was unacquainted to Cambridge through Bishop's Stortford, or take a route I knew through Royston. The choice fell upon the Stortford road, and later I was

glad I had taken it, for about a mile to the south of Stortford I discovered that I was upon the right track.

I was bowling along at about fifteen miles an hour when I came upon two horses grazing at the road-side. They galloped off at my approach, and, a few seconds later, I came upon a specimen of the Pirate's handiwork, which at first sight was irresistibly ludicrous. A brougham was drawn up at the side of the road, and, bound to the wheels, were a coachman and a footman, clad in gorgeous liveries. The coachman was fat and florid, the footman a particularly fine specimen of flunkeydom, and their faces, as the light of my lamps fell upon them—they could not speak, for they were both gagged as well as bound—were so convulsed with terror, that I could see they did not look upon me as a friend. As I dismounted from my car to go to their assistance, I heard a dismal wail from the roof of the vehicle and, looking up, I perceived a portly old lady perched upon the uncomfortable eminence.

I made an attempt to explain that my intentions were purely pacific, but as I could elicit nothing from the old lady but appeals to spare her life, I turned my attention to the two men, and speedily released them from their bonds. By the time they were loose they had realized that I was a friend; but it was some time before I managed to obtain from them an account of how they got into such a mess. Even when their powers of speech had returned they were unable to give a lucid account of the affair.

Of course it was the work of the Pirate. They had

been returning with their mistress—the old lady on the roof of the brougham—from some local coming-of-age festivities, when they had met the rascal. He had bound the servants, set the horses free, and, after robbing the old lady of all the jewellery she wore, he had compelled her to climb to the position where I discovered her, threatening to return and kill her if she moved from her position for an hour. It needed much persuasion before she ventured to descend from her perch; but with the assistance of the coachman, I managed to get her inside the brougham, and further assisting in securing the two horses, I left them.

This incident delayed me for nearly half an hour, and it was a good deal past one before I again set out on my quest. The brougham had been stopped just near a bye-road, and as the footman had assured me that the Pirate had taken this path when he departed, I thought I would follow. I could see for myself that a motor-car had passed that way, for the thunderstorm of the previous day had left the roads heavy in places, and the marks of his tyres were plainly visible.

I had followed the road for about a couple of miles further when I came once more upon some of the Pirate's victims. These, too, were returning from the same function at which the old lady had been a guest, when they fell into the clutches of the Pirate. In this case my assistance was not required, for the two young ladies of the party had recovered sufficiently from their fright to have already set at liberty their male companion

and the coachman. They told me of their experiences, and after I had heard them, I thought that Forrest's idea that the Pirate was a madman more likely than I had done previously.

When stopped by the Pirate, the husband of one of the ladies had shown fight until he had been felled by a blow from the butt end of a revolver. The coachman had discreetly made no resistance. Then, after securing the jewels the women wore, the Pirate had displayed a freakish humour quite new to his character. He had insisted upon the two women dancing for his amusement in the road, threatening to shoot the husband if they did not comply with his request. They assured me that he had sat chuckling with laughter, and urging them on with all sorts of wild threats, until they fell from exhaustion. They were splashed with mud from head to foot, and their dainty frocks presented a sorry sight. In addition they told me that they could barely stand, for their feet were cut to pieces, since, at the first steps of the weird dance, their slippers had stuck in the mud, and they were given no opportunity to stop and recover them.

I did not wait to hear more than the barest outline of the story, for I learned that he had left them not more than ten minutes before my arrival on the scene, and with the heavy roads, I thought there was at least a chance of some lucky accident bringing me face to face with my quarry.

CHAPTER XIX

A HOT SCENT

I RAN on through the night, but I could not make any great progress. I was now involved in a maze of Essex bye-roads, totally unknown to me, and every few minutes I was compelled to dismount, and search for the tracks. I never lost them, however, until I came once more to a high-road. The curve of the tyre marks at the junction of the road gave me the direction I needed, and, letting my car go, in four or five minutes I found myself running into the electric-lighted streets of a town. The place was deserted, but eventually I found a policeman, and of him I inquired whether anything had been seen or heard of the Pirate. There was no need for me to describe the appearance of the pirate car. It was as well-known throughout the land, as the Lord Mayor's coach, but he had seen nothing of it, and was quite positive that it had not passed through the town. An ordinary car had passed about half an hour before my arrival, and though the constable's description of the car was not very lucid, it was sufficiently near the mark to make me think of Mannering.

"I fancy the man you describe is a friend of mine," I said. "Which direction did he take?"

"He went straight along the Colchester road," was the astonishing reply.

"The Colchester road?" I inquired. "What town is this, then?"

"This is Chelmsford, sir," he answered, with a surprise equalling my own.

I could see my unguarded question had awakened his suspicions of me, so I made haste to remark that I had not realized how quickly I had travelled, adding that I might have known there was no other town of the size thereabouts.

"I am afraid," I added, "that if you had met me outside the borough you would have had a case for the Bench in the morning."

"I don't take no heed of speed myself, sir, when the roads is clear," he remarked; "but when the traffic's thick, it's another matter."

I thought his sound common sense deserved a reward. Anyway it got one, and with a cheerful good night, I set my car going at a pace which made me hope that any other constable I chanced to meet would prove as intelligent as he from whom I had just parted. It is about twenty-two miles from Chelmsford to Colchester, and, in spite of the greasy state of parts of the road, I managed the distance in thirty minutes.

Every one of those minutes I expected to be able

to overtake Mannering; but I saw nothing of him, and by the time I came to Colchester, I began to fancy that he must have given me the slip at some bye-road. From my inquiries at Colchester, I learned, however, that I was still on the right scent; but I was mightily puzzled to discover that though he was driving the old car which he had always declared was unable to compass more than twelve or fourteen miles an hour, he was still half an hour ahead of me.

He was still going away from town, and I followed. There is no need for me to give in any detail particulars of my journey that night. Day was breaking when I came into Ipswich, and it was broad daylight when I passed through the long, untidy street of Wickham Market. Mannering still kept ahead, and I followed doggedly. I heard of him at Saxmundham, but when I inquired at Blythburgh, I found I had missed him, and I had to hark back to Yoxford before I got on his track again. He had taken the side route to Halesworth, through which he had passed in the direction of Beccles. By this time he was an hour ahead of me, and, as he had left Beccles by the Yarmouth road, I went ahead as fast as I dared. It was not quite my highest speed, for by this time I was both tired and hungry, and the strain of travelling over unknown roads at a high speed at night made my head swim. I knew that unless I could soon get food and rest I should soon be fit for nothing. So immediately I reached Yarmouth, I went to a hotel, ordered breakfast, indulged in a hot bath while

it was preparing, and went to sleep in my chair directly I had eaten the meal.

The waiter awakened me about ten. I went down to the beach and indulged in a swim, and, returning to the hotel, amazed the waiter by ordering and doing justice to a second breakfast before taking my departure.

On leaving the hotel, my first consideration was to get my tank refilled, and, that done, I sent off a couple of wires, one to Evie and the other addressed to Forrest, at my own place, telling each of them to communicate with me at Sutgrove Hall if anything happened, for it was my intention to call at my home if I could possibly manage to do so.

My next business was to search for traces of Mannering in Yarmouth, but it was some time before I ascertained that the man I imagined to be he, had left by the coast road through Caister. It was a tedious job to track him through the Norfolk lanes, for he had turned and doubled as if anxious to throw a pursuer off the scent, and it was one o'clock before I eventually struck the high-road between Norwich and Cromer. There I finally lost him, owing chiefly to the fact that the day was fine, and a large number of motor-cars were on the road in consequence.

By this time I was beginning to think my impulsive action to be more than a little foolish, but in order that my journey should not be altogether wasted, I determined to run on to Cromer, lunch there, and afterwards proceed to Sheringham, near which delightful village my home

was situated, and seize the opportunity to make arrangements with my aunt for Evie's visit.

In pursuance of this plan, in half an hour's time, I walked into the dining-room of the Royal Hotel at Cromer. You may judge of my surprise when I saw Mannering seated at a table at one of the windows. He observed my entrance, and, rising, greeted me heartily.

"Hullo, Sutgrove!" he said. "This is indeed a welcome surprise. I had not the slightest idea you were in this part of the country."

"If you had, I presume you would not have chosen it for the scene of your exploits," I replied.

The expression of astonishment which spread over his features at my rejoinder was so perfect that I felt all my suspicions begin to crumble away.

"I don't follow you," he remarked.

His manner was either the result of one of the best pieces of acting I had ever seen in my life, or due to absolute unconsciousness of my meaning. It made me remember that though there were undoubtedly suspicious circumstances connecting him with the Motor Pirate, yet so far there was not one iota of direct evidence. I thought it best to temporize.

"Oh," I remarked; "I was only referring to your attempts to cut the records with your old car."

He smiled calmly before replying. "You may be nearer the truth than you think. I've had a new motor fixed in the car—an idea of my own, and I find she travels at quite a decent pace. That's why I left home

last night. After the rain I thought the roads would certainly be clear enough to give me the opportunity of making a fair test. The engine is a model of the one I have designed for the new car which I mentioned—last night was it? No; the night before."

I was fairly staggered at his assurance. His demeanour was entirely without the suggestion of his being in any way aware that he was an object of suspicion.

"Were you not afraid of meeting the Pirate? I heard he was abroad last night," I said.

"Afraid!" he remarked witheringly. "Afraid! All I am afraid of is, that some of your Scotland Yard friends will be beforehand with me in his capture, and that is an adventure which has a particular appeal to me, since he left his mark upon me here." He tapped his shoulder significantly. "I have promised myself to repay this injury with interest."

"Well, I suppose we are as likely to meet him here as anywhere," I ventured to remark.

"I hope so," he answered. "But I am not stopping here for long. I've taken a bed for the night, because I feel confoundedly tired after last night's run. But what brings you down here? Are you motoring?"

"In the first place I wanted a word with you," I replied.

"With me?" The amazement in his voice was obvious.

"Yes," I said; "that is my principal object."

"But how did you discover my address? I left no word with any one."

"I'll tell you later," I said.

"Well, we have plenty of time to talk," he replied. "If there's any little difficulty in which I can be of any assistance, I need hardly assure you I am at your service. But hadn't you better have lunch first?" He lowered the tone of his voice. "Unless you wish the waiters to become acquainted with your affairs, I should think what you have to say could be much better said outside. Neither pier nor esplanade are much frequented at this time of the year."

The suggestion was so natural and reasonable that, after a moment's consideration, I decided to accept it.

All through the meal he chatted as easily as if there was not the slightest possibility of anything happening to interrupt the friendship which had always ostensibly existed between us. The longer we talked, the more puzzled I became. His manners were so natural, so fearless, that it was quite impossible for me to believe that I was sitting at lunch with the Motor Pirate. He was very curious to know how I had learned of his intention to come to Cromer, and I was induced to tell him of my experiences on the previous night. I watched his face keenly while I narrated the stories of the Pirate's victims. He listened quite gravely, not even the ghost of a smile crossing his face when I told him of the ludicrous pictures presented by the old lady and her two servants.

"It is no laughing matter," he observed. "The rascal was bad enough when he confined his attentions to men; but now he has taken to bestowing them upon women, he deserves no mercy, and when I am able to get upon his track, he will get none."

"Then you are really hoping to join in the hunt?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "I'll let you into my secret. At my place at St. Stephens, I had a car which only wanted one minor detail to make it complete. I have known for months, that if I could supply that detail, I should be in possession of a car which would outpace even the Pirate's. For months I've racked my brains over it. A week ago an idea occurred to me. I worked it out. I tried it for the first time last night. It has proved to be a success. The day after to-morrow I shall join in the pursuit of the Motor Pirate, so if your Scotland Yard friend does not make haste, he will be too late."

"What power do you propose to use?" I asked. "Petrol?"

He laughed before replying. "A month ago I would have told nobody; but to-day there is no need of secrecy; my drawings are all ready for deposit at the Patent Office, so there is no chance of any one forestalling me."

"Well, what is it?" I said.

"I don't want you to tell anybody else just yet," he said; and as I nodded my acquiescence, he continued, "My new motor is on an entirely novel principle. It

is a turbine engine, worked by the expansion of liquid hydrogen."

"What?" I gasped. The idea was so novel that I could not grasp it. He lifted his hand, checking the questions which started to my lips.

"No. No questions, if you please: because, if you ask any, I shall not answer them. Meanwhile, you have not yet told me how you learned of my presence here?"

I related how, in the course of my inquiries at Chelmsford, I had ascertained that a person so like himself had passed through the town, that I had determined to attempt to overtake him, little thinking the chase would prove so stern.

He chaffingly congratulated me on my tracking powers, and expressed regret that I had not made my appearance earlier, so that we might have arranged a race; and by the time we had finished lunch, I was as completely convinced as I had ever been of anything in my life, that he had no connection whatsoever with the Pirate. Still, I was none the less determined to tackle him upon the subject of the influence which Evie declared he exerted over her, so when the meal was over, we left the hotel together and, seeing from the front that the pier was practically deserted, I led the way to the far end, determined to have a complete explanation.

He was silent during our walk. So was I, for I was deliberating how best to introduce the subject. As it happened, he made the task easy for me, as after finding

a comfortable seat and lighting a cigarette, he turned to me with—

"Now, old fellow, what is it you have on your mind? Out with it!"

I told him—told him fully and frankly everything that Evie had mentioned to me concerning him, and I finished by warning him that I was determined to exercise the right she had given me to protect her. He listened to me attentively and, one might have thought, even sympathetically. When I had concluded, he sat silent awhile; then, looking me full in the eyes, he remarked—

"I suppose, Sutgrove, if I tell you that this story of the influence I am supposed to exercise over Miss Maitland is absolute news to me, you will not believe me?"

I was staggered, and my astonishment must have been visible in my face, for he continued—

"You may be surprised, but not half so much as I have been, by what you have told me. Really, the whole story sounds the maddest farrago of nonsense I have ever heard."

I was about to make an angry retort, but he checked me with a gesture—

"I do not mean any offence," he said; "for I can quite understand what your feelings on the subject must be. I, no more than yourself, would tolerate any unwarrantable interference such as you describe. It is just as well that you should have mentioned the matter to

me, however, for you will know so much better how to proceed."

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

"Why, what else than that you will not waste any time before obtaining medical advice for Miss Maitland," he replied.

I felt a grey horror creeping over me—a horror that tied my tongue, to think that Evie—my Evie—might prove to be—mad. Again, he must have divined my thoughts, for he said reassuringly—

"You must not take too serious a view of the case Miss Maitland is of a highly nervous temperament, and, I should imagine, rather prone to hysteria." Then, rising, he clapped me on the shoulder, "Take a cheerful view, Sutgrove. I'll bet you ten to one that her doctor will inform you that marriage will provide a complete cure."

His tone was so hearty, so friendly, that I instinctively grasped his hand, and he returned my grip.

The subject was not resumed; and, as we walked back to the hotel, I was completely convinced that I had been an unutterable cad ever to allow a single doubt concerning him to enter my mind, much less to harbour there.

I left him at the hotel door and went in search of my car to continue my journey to Sutgrove Hall. He was still standing where I parted from him when I swept past, and he waved his hand to me, a smile upon his face.

CHAPTER XX

RELATES HOW THE PIRATE HOLDS UP AN AUGUST PERSONAGE

I REACHED my destination about five, and found, as I hoped, a telegram awaiting my arrival. It read—

"Ever so much better. Do not worry about me. Cannot spare you for long though. Lots of love.—E."

With my mind very much relieved, I was able to devote my attention to my aunt, who was full of questions as to the reason for my unexpected arrival and equally eager for a full account of my doings during the past six months, during which time, she assured me, I had grossly neglected my duties, especially by my failure to keep her adequately posted regarding my engagement.

I was anxious, after reading Evie's wire, to start forthwith for St. Albans; my aunt was equally anxious that I should remain the night at Sutgrove, and while we were arguing the point, a second telegram arrived, which settled the matter. I tore open the envelope and read—

"Meet the 8.49 at Cromer with motor. Do not fail. Most important.—FORREST."

The message had been handed in at Liverpool Street at 4.50, and I wondered what could have happened to necessitate Forrest's presence in Norfolk. There was little use speculating, however, and I settled down to satiate, if it were possible, my aunt's curiosity.

She was duly impressed by such of my adventures as I thought fit to relate, but she was not neglectful of what she considered her duties as hostess and, in spite of the fact that I had eaten a hearty lunch about two, I was able shortly after seven to do adequate justice to the early dinner which she provided for me. I left home soon after eight, and, in consequence of my impatience, had to wait ten minutes on the Cromer platform for the arrival of the train.

As the engine drew into the station, I saw Forrest's head thrust out of the window of one of the carriages, and, before the train had come to a standstill, he had leaped from the door and was at my side. He was for him unusually excited, and, without reply to my greeting, save with a silent hand grip, he said—

"Seen anything of Mannering?"

"Why, yes," I replied directly. "I lunched with him, to-day. He's stopping at the Royal."

"That's a bit of luck," replied the detective. "Come along;" and he pushed on in advance of me through the barrier.

"What has happened?" I asked, as I caught him up in the station yard.

"I hold a warrant for his arrest, and I am desirous of

executing it at the earliest possible moment, that's all," he replied.

I could hardly believe my ears. "What in the world for?" I asked.

"What should it be for?" said Forrest, with a touch of sarcasm in the tone of his voice.

"He cannot be the Motor Pirate. It is impossible. He could not have deceived me so completely," I exclaimed.

"I would stake everything I hope for in the future, as well as everything I possess at the present moment, that he is though," returned the detective with conviction. "But we must not waste time. Take me to the hotel."

Without stopping to argue the point, I jumped on my car, Forrest took the seat beside me, and we proceeded to the Royal.

"Leave the car and come with me, I may want your assistance," he said, as we pulled up at the entrance to the hotel.

He sprang out the moment I stopped and ran briskly up the steps. A porter was in the hall, and to him Forrest turned.

"I want to see a Mr. Mannering, who is stopping here, at once, and I do not wish to be announced," he said.

The man walked across to the office and made an inquiry of the clerk, then returning, announced that Mannering had left an hour previously.

"Left?" said Forrest, and his jaw fell. He stepped across to the office himself, only to learn that though

Mannering had booked a room for the night, he had after dinner called for his bill, paid it, and left on his motor, without giving any reason for his alteration of plans.

Forrest stalked out of the hotel, his brow heavy with thought. I followed him. He stepped on to the car, and, taking my seat, I asked him tersely—

"Where to?"

"St. Albans," he replied with brevity equal to my own, and without further question we were off.

"Don't mind taking a few risks," he said presently. "The sooner we can get there the better I shall be pleased."

Then, leaning back in his seat, he asked me to tell him how I happened to learn of Mannering's presence in Cromer, and what he had said to convince me that he was in no way connected with the Pirate. So while we were still running at a moderate pace, I gave him a brief history of my adventures of the previous night. Before I had concluded, however, the road ahead seemed clear, and, pulling my mask over my face, I jammed on my highest speed and conversation became impossible.

Forrest pulled his cap down over his eyes and, turning his coat-collar about his ears, settled himself apparently to slumber. Within half an hour the lights of Norwich sparkled in front of us, and it became necessary to slacken speed. Forrest immediately resumed the conversation at the point where we had broken off, and questioned me closely with regard to what Mannering had said to me.

Once and again I endeavoured to ascertain what had induced him to take out the warrant; but he would not satisfy my curiosity, declaring that it was of more importance that he should know all that I could tell him first. There seemed little likelihood of my learning anything, for we soon left Norwich behind us, and were running at full speed on the road to Thetford and Newmarket, slackening speed only slightly as we swept through the villages and trusting to the continuous toot-toot of the horn to clear our path. Our progress was uninterrupted until we had reached and left the little town of Attleborough five or six miles behind us, when Forrest was afforded an opportunity, much to his chagrin, of giving me the reasons for his haste.

Incidentally, I may remark, that the occurrence which afforded this opportunity came very near depriving me of the chance of hearing anything from anybody, or him from ever opening his lips again, for while we swept along at our top speed there was a sudden hissing sound, a sudden succession of jars, and the car swerved violently, nearly overturning. I jammed on both my breaks, and by good fortune the car did not overturn. I guessed what had happened, and there was no need for me to get a light to make sure—my sense of touch informed me that the off back tyre was as flat as a pancake.

I hoped that the injury was only slight, but my hopes faded the moment I examined the injury. The tyre had picked up a curved and pointed piece of iron, and had been irreparably damaged. No patching was of any use.

There was nothing for it but to replace the tyre with a new one. Fortunately, I was prepared with a spare outer cover as well as inner tubes, and, with a muttered curse, I threw off my coat and set about the job. Then when that was done, and it took me a good hour to complete the task, I discovered, on restarting the car, that a further misfortune had befallen us. Either owing to the jumping of the car when the tyre went, or more likely because of the sudden application, the footbreak had seized, and the transmission was so far injured that I could not get the car along above seven or eight miles an hour. I did my best to put the damage right. I lay on my back in the middle of the road, and used all the language approved by the most fluent members of the Automobile Club for use on such occasions, but entirely without result. Exactly where we were I did not know, and, after I had relieved my feelings, I thought it best to jog along until we came to some town where it would be possible to get skilled assistance.

And it was while we were progressing in this humdrum fashion that Forrest confided to me the reasons for his anxiety.

"In the first place," he said, "your theory as to the stud found by Mannering's servants proved to be correct. It was Winter's. I arrived at St. Albans the first thing this morning, and, after getting your note, went straight away and interviewed the girls. They handed me the trinket. I took it to Winter, and he identified it. He will swear to it anywhere. By the time I had done this,

your wire for me had arrived, and your man, having seen me go into Winter's house, brought it on. I took the next train to town and went straight to the Yard, thankful that at last I was able to report something definite. Besides, I wanted to take a warrant without any one being aware of it, and I knew I could manage that better in London than in the country. Well, I called at the Yard, ran across to Bow Street and got my warrant, and returned to the Yard in order to instruct a couple of our men who had been placed at my disposal. While I was there particulars came to hand of a feat which throws all the other doings of the Pirate into the shade. You mentioned, I think, that Mannering, when he told Miss Maitland that he was going away, said that all England would be talking of him."

"She said so," I replied doubtfully; "but she was so excited——"

"She was probably correct in her recollection of what passed," he said. "If further proof were wanted to connect your friend with the Motor Pirate, those words would be sufficient. If what I know leaks out, the Pirate will fill the popular mind more to-morrow than he has done in the past even. Yesterday morning, within six miles of Sandringham, he held up"—he hesitated—"I must mention no names—he held up, let me say, an August Personage——"

"The King?" I cried.

"An August Personage," remarked Forrest, severely, "in broad daylight."

"Let me hear all about it?" I asked eagerly.

"I don't know that I can tell you everything, for so far I only know the particulars wired to the Yard. But the story is complete enough to enable me to do what I have hitherto failed in, and that is, complete the necessary identification of our friend Mannering. And curiously enough, it is owing to the keen powers of observation possessed by the——"

"The August Personage," I reminded him, a trifle maliciously as he hesitated.

Forrest laughed. "Quite right, you score that time," he remarked, before resuming his tale. "Owing to the August Personage's keen powers of observation, I am able to lay my finger on the one point which has puzzled me, namely, the manner by which Mannering has managed to escape suspicion. It is a simple trick. So simple, in fact, that I cannot conceive how I managed to overlook such a possibility for so long. However, you shall hear the facts as they were told to me, and judge for yourself with what transparent means we have been hoodwinked by the rascal. The August Personage, who, as you are probably aware, has been staying at Sandringham for some days past, has been in the habit of taking a ride on one of his cars whenever the roads were in good condition, accompanied only by his chauffeur. This morning he started for the customary run shortly after eleven, with the intention of taking a circular trip through Hunstanton, Burnham, Docking and Bircham, and returning for luncheon. The intention was not fulfilled since, before

reaching Hunstanton, the Pirate made his appearance, and approaching as usual from behind, overtook the August motor. The August driver did not at first take any notice of the approaching car, but, merely imagining that the driver had recognized him, and felt some delicacy at passing, he signalled with his hand for the stranger to go ahead. What was his surprise to hear the stranger in a loud voice bid him stop his car. He turned to look at the audacious person who had dared take such unwarrantable liberty, and at once observed with whom he had to deal. The Pirate had in his hand a revolver, which was levelled at the August head. The August face flushed with anger, and turning away, he contemptuously took no notice of the summons. The Pirate thereupon fired two shots, aimed, fortunately, neither at the August Personage nor at the chauffeur, but at the tyres of the back wheels. The aim was good, the tyres ran down at once, and the August Personage found progress on the rims to be so uncomfortable that he thought it desirable to stop. The stranger ranged alongside, and the chauffeur, rising from his seat, was about to throw himself at the throat of the assailant, when his August master laid a hand upon his arm.

"'No, no,' he said, 'I can easily get another car, but I do not know that I could replace my chauffeur.'

"Thereupon the Pirate observed, 'I think, sir, there is so much wisdom in your remark that, in spite of my necessities, I almost feel inclined to forego my usual toll in your case.'

"The August Personage, whose coolness had never for a moment deserted him, replied imperturbably—

"'Having robbed me of a morning's enjoyment, it seems to me there is nothing of any particular value left for you to take.'

"'Then, sir,' replied the rascal, 'you will be doubtless glad to purchase my immediate disappearance with the contents of the August pockets?'

"August was not the word he used, but it was one which showed that he was acquainted with the personality of his victim.

"The August Personage shrugged his shoulders, and, searching his pockets, could produce nothing but a cigarette case and a button. To show his *sang-froid*, I need only remark that when he produced the latter article he laughed heartily and said to the chauffeur—

"'I hope, P——, you have something to add to the contents of my pockets, or I fear this too eager gentleman will destroy our front tyres as well as the back.'

"The chauffeur had some loose gold, a silver matchbox, and a watch, and when these were produced, speaking with the same nonchalance he had retained throughout, the August Personage remarked—

"'I fear you have drawn a blank this time, Mr. Pirate; for, upon my word, that is the best I can do for you.'

"The Pirate took the articles. Then he raised his hat. 'I take,' he said, 'the August word as readily as I take these souvenirs of this memorable meeting,' and with these words, he pulled a lever and was speedily out of sight."

"By Jove!" I muttered. "The fellow's audacity is almost past belief. But you said something of observations made by the August victim?"

"Yes," said Forrest. "The chauffeur was much too agitated to notice anything, but his master was not. He observed four things. First, that the Pirate was a man of about six feet in height."

"Mannering is five feet eleven and a quarter in his socks," I remarked.

"Secondly, that his hair was black. Thirdly, that the nails of the right hand, with which he took his plunder, were bitten to the quick."

"The identification becomes nearly perfect," I interrupted.

"Fourthly, that the car was originally a two-seated car, with a tonneau body, but that the seat had been set back, and the bonnet was enclosed by metal plates shaped into the form of the bow of a canoe, and bolted together in a manner which gave the impression that they might easily be removed. Why," continued the detective, "I did not think of so obvious a solution of the Pirate's mysterious disappearances before I cannot imagine. It is the trick the black flag merchants have practised since the days of Captain Kidd."

I was silent. I could only wonder at my own blindness. Then an excuse occurred to me.

"After all," I remarked, "we only met him in the dark."

CHAPTER XXI

WE PLAN AN AMBUSH

Forrest had just concluded his story when the lights of Thetford gleamed in our eyes. The time was 12.30. The last train was gone. The inhabitants were all in bed, and there we were, stranded with a broken car, and no means of putting it right. Forrest would not despair, however, and after some difficulty we managed, with the assistance of the local police, to knock up a man who was locally reputed to know all about motors. He was a little surly at first, but the inducement I offered him to make an attempt to put the transmission right, was sufficient to dissipate his very natural disgust at being disturbed in his beauty sleep. Fortunately his local reputation had reasonable foundation. He was a very capable mechanician, and the way he set about the job gave me great hopes that the car would run as well as ever when he had done with it. And my expectations were gratified. In less than an hour he had completed the repairs. I paid him and asked him to remain up for ten minutes in case we had another breakdown, telling him that after that period had elapsed, he would be at liberty to return to his

bed. Whether he waited the ten minutes or not I do not know, for by that time we were halfway to Newmarket, flying through the darkness at a pace which two months previously I would not have dared venture upon in broad daylight. And right onward to St. Albans, we kept it up, reaching the ancient town just as the birds began to twitter in the hedges at the first grey light of early dawn. At St. Albans we stopped at the police-station. A man was waiting at the door.

"Any news?" asked Forrest.

The man shook his head.

"You know where to bring it?" asked my companion.

The man nodded.

"Let us get on home," said Forrest to me.

As I wheeled my vehicle into my yard I thought I should drop. The strain of that rush through the night, expecting every moment that something would give way, had been tremendous, and the moment the tension was relaxed I shook like an aspen leaf. When I tried to get in at my own door I found I could not fit the latch-key, and was obliged to hand it to the detective. He saw what was the matter with me, and the moment we were inside, he led the way to my study, thrust me down into a chair and mixed me a whisky-and-soda. I was never more grateful for a drink in my life. It pulled me together, and in less time than I had conceived possible, I felt as if I could have managed another seventy-five miles without a halt.

The moment he saw my nerves were steady again,

Forrest proposed that we should get something to eat. I declared that I did not want anything.

"When you haven't time for sleep, the next best thing is to feed well if you want to keep fit," he remarked. "Besides, I am as hungry as a hunter has a right to be."

"That settles it," I laughed. "We shall have to forage for ourselves. The servants are all asleep."

We found our way to the larder and made a hearty meal on a cold pie we found there; and directly we had finished, we set out forthwith in the direction of Mannering's home. As soon as we arrived opposite the house, Forrest paused and gave a low whistle. It was answered immediately by a man dressed as a labourer, who made his appearance from behind the hedge opposite the house.

"Any one been here to-night, Laver?" asked Forrest.

"No one," the man answered. "The servants turned in about ten after locking up. No signs of any one about the place since."

"That's all right," grunted Forrest. "We shall be ready for him when he does come. Have you got the tools?"

The man was proceeding to scramble through the hedge when Forrest checked him.

"Better stay where you are," he advised. "Keep out of sight, and if I whistle, come at once."

"All right, sir," replied the man, as he handed through a gap in the hedge a small chamois leather bag.

I had no idea as to what steps Forrest proposed to adopt in order to effect the arrest, so I asked him, and he explained briefly his plan of campaign.

"One can see," he remarked, "that Mannering feels so confident of the completeness of his disguise that he will have no hesitation about returning. I am reckoning, too, upon there being an element of truth in the story he has told you about the construction of his motor, in which case his own workshop would be the only place where he would be able to refill his tank. We shall be able to decide that point in a very few minutes. If we do find any plant for the production of liquid gases, we can count upon catching our man within a very few hours."

"Unless he smells a rat, and makes for some convenient port and gets out of the country," I remarked.

"That eventuality is provided against," remarked the detective. "His description is in the hands of the police at every port in the kingdom, and even if he changes the colour of his hair, I don't think he will manage to get away. What I propose is, that we shall remain concealed in his coach-house and await his return."

"How are we going to get in?" I inquired.

Forrest took a bunch of skeleton keys from the bag Laver had handed to him and dangled them before his eyes.

"There's not a burglar in the kingdom is better provided," he remarked, and set to work upon the lock forthwith.

The lock was an ordinary one, and his efforts were speedily successful. The door swung open, and we

entered eagerly a bare, stone-paved coach-house. Opposite the door by which we had entered from the road was a similar door, which gave upon the inner yard. On the left, a large sliding door had been fixed in place of the wall which had divided the coach-house from the stables. Relocking the door by which we had entered, Forrest led the way to the door on the left. It was unfastened, and as it swung back a cry of amazement sprang to my lips.

"Hush—sh—sh!" said the detective warningly.

But I could not have repressed the cry, for there before me stood a replica of the car I had seen on two occasions. There was only one point of difference at first apparent. The pirate car had been black. This one was built of aluminium and gleamed silvery white. But although the lines were very similar, I soon came to the conclusion that the car we saw before us was not the one which the Pirate had used when engaged upon his nefarious work. One glance at the tyres convinced me that they had never been upon the road, and I fancied that the wheels were smaller and the lines of the body finer altogether. I pointed these things out to Forrest, who, while agreeing that this particular car could not have been the one which had been responsible for holding up the "August Personage" on the previous day, would not commit himself further.

We did not spend much time upon a close examination of the car, for the other contents of the building claimed our attention. We found ourselves in a long

workshop. There were no windows in the walls, but the place was amply illuminated by a skylight which ran along nearly the whole length of the northern slope of the roof. On the right of the large door by which we had entered the inner shop was a small room, which had probably once served as a harness-room, for through this another door gave on to the yard, though this exit was evidently never used, for the door was fixed by screws. The contents were a couple of broken chairs, and some coats and rugs hung upon hooks upon the walls, together with a miscellaneous assortment of odds and ends upon a shelf. I gave merely a cursory glance at the contents of this apartment, for my attention had been attracted by a plant of machinery, which occupied the far end of the large room. As it happened, I had once had an opportunity of inspecting the laboratory of the Royal Institution, and I recognized at once that Mannering had set up an installation for the preparation of some one or other of the liquid gases. Without this experience, I doubt whether it would have been possible for me to guess even the purpose for which the plant had been devised. As it was, I had no hesitation in discovering the receiver into which the liquid gas was distilled; and when I let a little of the liquid with which it was filled run into a glass which I found handy, and saw the air fall in a shower of tiny snow-flakes as the stuff evaporated, I knew that Mannering had told me the exact truth when he had informed me that liquid hydrogen supplied the power for his new car.

Once satisfied on this point, I examined the other contents of the place. I do not think there is any need to particularize all that we discovered, even if my memory served me. Practically the workshop contained a sufficient engineering equipment to build such a car as stood in the centre, though I judged that there was no convenience for the forging of the parts of the motor.

Still, as I pointed out to Forrest, there was nothing in all these discoveries to negative the truth of the story Mannering had told me about his being engaged in building a car which should serve to outpace the Pirate car, but he would not listen to any theorising on the subject.

"He can tell that story to the jury," he said, as he significantly drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and clinked them together. Then he proceeded to investigate the contents of the harness-room, while I went back to the new car and began a careful examination of the engines. The whole mechanism was, however, so novel to me, that I could only surmise as to the method of its working. I did notice, however, that the driving and steering gear varied very little from that of my own car, so far as it was controlled by the levers and wheel, while the breaks seemed to be particularly powerful. There was only seating accommodation for two, and judging from the size of the tank which was fitted behind the seat, I judged that Mannering contemplated runs over distances which would make large demands upon his supply of liquid gas.

At the moment I made this discovery, I heard Forrest

call to me in an excited whisper, and going across to him, I found him contemplating with keen interest a dirty piece of rope.

"Look here, Sutgrove," he said; "this is the piece of cord with which he trussed me up on the occasion when he dropped me into the pond. Compare it with this"—he kicked a coil which lay at his feet—"and tell me if they are not identical."

I examined them both, and came to the conclusion that Forrest was correct in his supposition. Next, mounting one of the chairs, he proceeded to rummage amongst the rubbish piled on the shelf. A moment later he observed triumphantly, albeit in subdued tones, "Another piece of evidence," and descending from his perch, he handed me a box of cartridges. A glance at the label had apparently been enough, nevertheless, to make sure, he searched again in his pocket, and produced the bullet which had proved fatal to the poor victim at Towcester. He compared it with one of the cartridges, and gave a grunt of content. "I fancy we shall soon obtain sufficient evidence to hang him," he murmured. Then a shadow crossed his face. "What an infernal dunderhead I have been not to suspect him before," he said, and turning impatiently away, he replaced the box of cartridges on the shelf, before renewing his systematic examination of the rest of the contents of the room. The search revealed nothing further, and at length he desisted.

All the while we were keenly on the alert to detect any sound which should tell us of the approach of

Mannering's car. But the minutes passed and grew into hours without a sign. It must have been about five in the morning when we had entered the coach-house, and when I saw by my watch that it was nearly ten, I began to think that in some way or another Mannering had got warning of the danger that threatened him. I suggested to Forrest that we might as well leave our hiding-place, but he would not hear of it.

"I don't leave this building except in his company, unless I hear that he has been captured elsewhere," he declared obstinately. "At the same time, don't let me detain you."

I wanted badly to see Evie, whom I thought might be getting anxious concerning me; but I hardly liked the idea of leaving Forrest to tackle Mannering alone if he should return. However, my first desire triumphed, so I persuaded Forrest to let me out of the door, promising to return within as short a time as I could manage.

I hurried first to the Colonel's house, and had a brief interview with the dear girl, telling her what had happened and what was likely to happen in the near future. Next, I went to my own place, and had a basket packed with a plentiful luncheon, not forgetting to provide a couple of bottles of champagne, and thus provided I returned to the coach-house after an absence of less than an hour.

When in response to my signal Forrest admitted me, his eyes twinkled with satisfaction as he saw my burden.

"It is truly thoughtful of you," he remarked, as I

lifted the lid of the basket and revealed the contents. "I only hope our friend will not spoil our picnic by arriving in the middle of it."

The better to avoid any such *contretemps*, we set about our meal immediately with very good appetites. When we had finished, I do not know how Forrest felt, but I was confoundedly drowsy. I tried all sorts of tricks to keep my eyes open, but the quiet of the place, the coolness, and the subdued light of the saddle-room, where Forrest thought it best for us to remain, were too much for my powers of resistance and I dropped off to sleep.

I must have slumbered for a couple of hours, if not three, when I was suddenly awakened by a hand placed on my mouth, while a voice whispered in my ear—

"Wake up, man—wake up! There's no time to lose."

I came to myself with a start. Forrest had hold of me, and was shaking me violently. At the same moment I became aware of the throb of an approaching motor.

Recognizing the sound, I turned to the detective.

"That's Mannering," I whispered.

"Yes," replied my companion. "I could swear to the sound anywhere."

CHAPTER XXII

GONE AWAY

"Don't stir an inch until I give the signal," whispered Forrest in my ear, as soon as he saw I was fully awake. He was perfectly calm, and he closed the door in order to conceal us from the sight of any one entering the workshop.

The car pulled up outside. We heard the grate of the key in the lock, and the door creak on its hinges, as it swung open. There was a second grating noise, and I judged that the door of the inner yard had been opened by whoever had entered. There followed a few more pants from the motor, as it passed through the coach-house into the yard, and then everything was silent. The outer door shutting with a snap apprized us that the crucial moment was at hand, and my heart began to thump as I heard footsteps approaching. Forrest pointed to a vacant hook over my head, and I recognized why he had selected the harness-room for our hiding-place. The footsteps came slowly nearer, then stopped, and a long low laugh came from the lips of the unseen man. I thought we must have been discovered in our hiding-place and glanced at Forrest for instructions. He never

moved a muscle. He stood poised like a greyhound about to be slipped from the leash.

The footsteps approached again. The door knob rattled as a hand was laid upon it. The door flew open. Forrest darted forward.

I caught one glimpse of Mannering's face, for it was indeed he, and I saw it become suddenly livid. It was not the pallor of fear. His eyes flashed. He had doffed his coat and was holding it in one hand, and quick as was Forrest's spring, he was equally swift to meet it. His other hand passed swift as lightning from the door handle, and catching the edge of the coat, spread the garment in front of him. Forrest, missing his grip, plunged heavily into the wide folds of the garment. Mannering's arms closed as a vice. The door swinging back had momentarily blocked my passage. I thrust it open, and had taken one step forward to Forrest's assistance, when Mannering with a herculean effort, swung the detective from his feet, and hurled him full at me. It was a magnificent effort, and I went down with a crash amongst the remains of the lunch with Forrest on the top of me. The whole incident had not lasted twenty seconds, and before either of us could regain our feet, the door was slammed and locked.

Forrest was the first to regain his feet, and he rushed at the door furiously. We were trapped. The door was a strong one of oak, and I remembered that it fastened by a couple of bolts on the other side. The detective worried the door like a bear at the bars of his

cage, but he could not move it. He gnashed his teeth, and he was white with rage. From the other side we could hear the sound of heavy objects being moved, and we guessed that our enemy was piling the most massive articles his workshop contained against the door to make it more secure.

"D——n you, Sutgrove!" shouted the detective. "Don't stop to think, or we shall lose our man after all. Come, both together."

I saw his intention, and I could understand and forgive his curse in the excitement of the moment. Together we hurled ourselves against the door. It did not move an inch, and a long low chuckle greeted the attempt from the other side. We tried madly again and again, but the barrier was immovable.

Then I looked round for some tool which would enable me to break down the door itself. There were only the chairs available, and so I tore off the leg of one of them, and, bidding Forrest stand back, I swung the piece of wood round my head, and struck as hard as I could against one of the lower panels of the door. The improvised club flew into half a dozen fragments, but the panel had cracked. Forrest had provided himself meanwhile with a similar club, and directed his blows so effectively that the panel was driven out. I threw myself at the gap, trusting to be able to force my way through.

What I saw filled me with rage. The wheels of the new car were moving, and right before my eyes the car

disappeared into the outer coach-house. I made an unavailing attempt to struggle through the aperture, but the attempt was hopeless. It was too narrow to admit even my shoulders. Withdrawing, I told Forrest what I had seen.

"I had entirely forgotten Laver," he remarked, and putting his whistle to his mouth, he blew it shrill and clear.

Then together we renewed our attack upon the door. The sound of a shout from the outside followed by a pistol shot made us work like madmen, and within a minute, another panel gave, and we managed to get at the bolts and draw them. The articles piled against the door toppled in all directions, as we finally forced our way out.

We were too late. The outer door was wide open, and just on the threshold, was Forrest's unfortunate subordinate lying on the ground, with blood trickling down his arm. He struggled into a sitting position as we came out, and pointed up the road in the direction of St. Albans.

"Gone away, sir," he said.

"Hurt?" asked Forrest, pausing as he did so.

"Not much; smashed shoulder, I fancy," remarked the sufferer philosophically.

"I'll send assistance," said my companion as he rushed after me into the road, where I stood horror stricken at what met my gaze.

Fifty yards distant, opposite the entrance gate of

Colonel Maitland's house, the new car was standing still. It was empty. The gate was open, and even as I watched, I saw Mannering come out of the gate, bearing in his arms the helpless figure of a girl. There was no need to guess who the victim might be. Even before I saw him appear, I knew intuitively why he had stopped. Had he not told Evie that on the third day he would return, bidding her be ready for him?

I rushed forward towards the car, but before I had covered half the distance which separated me from it, he was aboard with his burden and I knew pursuit on foot to be hopeless.

Yet, even as I saw him move away, there flashed across my brain one means by which I might possibly get on terms with my enemy. There was just one chance, and one chance only, of rescuing my darling from the Pirate, and that chance depended entirely upon the question as to whether the car upon which Mannering had returned was fitted with the same sort of motor as that on which he had departed.

With the haste of a madman I returned to the coach-house I had just quitted. My hopes fell to zero. There was an unmistakable scent of petrol about the car. They rose again, however, upon a closer examination, for I saw at once that the motor was a turbine, though petrol was utilized in some way as a means of securing the necessary heat to secure the expansion of the gas for the starting of the engine, though I could see that once started, the expanded hydrogen was, as in the new car, ingeniously

utilized to produce the necessary heat. I was glad then that I had spent as much time as I had upon examining the car upon which the Pirate had escaped, for I was enabled to see that, if only a supply of the liquid hydrogen were obtainable, I should be able to put my wild plan into execution. As it was, the tank was nearly empty, so putting my shoulder to the car, I shoved it into the workshop where, unless Mannering had let it run to waste, I knew I should find a supply of the hydrogen. Thank Heaven, Mannering had forgot to empty the receiver, and filling the tank and tightly screwing down the nuts of the covering, I wheeled the car into the open road. There I saw Forrest leaning against the wall of the coach-house, a figure of inexpressible dejection.

"Come and lend a hand!" I shouted.

The light that flashed into his face, as he realized what I would be at, was extraordinary. He sprang forward at once to my assistance. Now, in my attempts to get at the machinery of the car, I had discovered the plates with which Mannering had been wont to disguise its shape, and it occurred to me that they performed the further purpose of diminishing the wind resistance, so that if I wanted to get the full speed out of the car it would be necessary to fix them in their places. I immediately set to work to join up the various sections, leaving Forrest to bolt them together. We worked like niggers at the job, and it was nearly completed when a curious sound came down the breeze. I looked up, and to my surprise I saw the Pirate once more approaching.

"Look!" I shouted to Forrest in my excitement, though there was no need to warn him.

Nearer the Pirate came; still nearer. Every moment I expected to see him pull up and surrender. But it was a mad hope. He had not the slightest intention of so obliging us. As he approached, he suddenly increased his pace and flashed past us at full sixty miles an hour.

Forrest fingered a revolver, but he dared not shoot for fear the bullet should find the slender form of Evie, who we saw was huddled close to his side. Mannering laughed as he passed us and waved his hand in derision.

"There are a couple of masks in the coach-house," I said quietly to the detective.

He darted into the doorway and returned a moment later with them, thrusting at the same time a bottle into his pocket. It took us no time to climb into the car and as, during his momentary absence, I had succeeded in starting the engine, we were in a position to move at once.

For a hundred yards we travelled at the speed at which we were accustomed to see Mannering while using the car in the sight of men and in the light of day. Then with a word of warning to my companion, I pulled at the change-speed lever. The effect was marvellous. The car seemed to leap forward and the hedges suddenly transformed themselves into long green streaks.

A cloud of dust on the road ahead gave the direction Mannering had taken, so I jammed down the lever to its limit and commenced the pursuit. At any other time

the idea of chasing the Pirate on one of his own cars would have delighted me beyond measure, but my thoughts were too much occupied as to the fate which might await Evie if we failed to overtake her abductor to allow room for anything else.

Exactly what speed we made I cannot tell, it must have been nearer eighty than sixty miles an hour, but the smoothness of the motion was wonderful, and I felt not the slightest tremor.

Mannering had disappeared on the Watford road, and in a few minutes we swept through the north end of the town and, directed by a boy at the cross roads, made for Rickmansworth. Forrest took charge of the horn, and kept it braying continuously. We slackened speed through Rickmansworth, for the streets were full of vehicles, and there we learned that the white car was five minutes ahead. Once clear of the streets I let the car go again, and we tore away towards Uxbridge. On reaching the main Oxford road once more a dust cloud in the distance served as a guide, and informed us that Mannering had crossed the highway, and gone away in the direction of Slough. The going was rough for a while, but I did not slacken pace, though the road was narrow, and to have met a cart would have meant certain destruction. The road broadened after a time, and I fancied we were gaining, for the dust cloud seemed nearer. We skirted Slough to the east, the guiding cloud bearing towards Dachet. Darting through that little riverside town at a pace which set the police whistles

blowing behind us, we came to the bridge across the Thames, and here we were informed that our quarry was barely a minute ahead, and running in the direction of Egham. A mile further on, at a straight piece of road, we first sighted the fugitives, and a cry of triumph escaped my lips. It was a little premature, however. Once again the silver car turned into a bye-road so winding that I was compelled, much against my will, to slacken speed. Then once more we came out upon a main road, to find our quarry not more than a hundred yards away as we swept out into the broad highway.

And here, looking back, Mannering for the first time learned that we were on his track. At that moment, too, commenced a race which, I venture to think, will not soon be equalled in the history of the motor world. At all events, I trust it will never be my lot to take part in any similar trial of speed, at least, with such issues depending upon the result. Upon emerging from the bye-road we were a mile from Egham, and knowing the road, I asked Forrest to glance at his watch. The way was clear before us, and three minutes and a quarter later, we flashed through the railway arch at Sunningdale railway-station, four miles from the point where the timing commenced. But fast as we had travelled, Mannering travelled faster. When we reached Bagshot we learned he was half a minute ahead.

We flew through the lovely pine country on the wings of the wind, through Hook, and so into Basingstoke. By this time we were covered from head to foot

with white dust, looking more like working masons than anything else; but wherever we went, I knew Forrest had the power to make the way easy. If he had been anybody else but a detective from Scotland Yard, we should never have got through Basingstoke, for there the police, warned in some manner of our approach, had drawn a huge waggon across the road, thus completely barring our progress. It was soon drawn aside when Forrest produced his badge, and once more we flew westwards. So through Whitchurch and Andover.

How we succeeded in escaping accidents I cannot explain. Providence seemed to watch over both pursuers and pursued. We were always on the verge of a collision with somebody or something. Cottages, carts, pedestrians, cyclists, seemed to be flying by in a never-ending procession. Yet we touched nothing.

Once past Andover the road became clearer, for instead of turning towards Salisbury, as I expected, the Pirate chose the road through Amesbury and Stonehenge. We swept over Salisbury Plain at a magnificent pace, but we did not catch sight of the fugitives, though now and again a glimpse of a distant dust cloud raised my hopes momentarily. At Wincanton we learned we were three minutes behind, and setting my teeth, I determined I would not slacken speed again until we overtook the fugitives or reached Exeter. The road was admirable hereabouts, and we ran so steadily that, but for the hedges flying past, we might have been sitting in armchairs. After Ilminster the road became steeper,

though it was yet too early in the year to be very rough.

But how is it possible to describe a journey at the pace we were making? Our progress became dream-like to me. It was almost monotonous. One could observe so little, just an incident here and there to mark the stages in the journey. Thus I remember Honiton by the frightened scream of a cur which was swept off its feet by the rush of the air as we passed close at his tail. Then nothing of note until we reached Exeter.

At the cathedral city we were told the white car was only a minute in advance. I began to wonder where the chase was going to end, for Mannering was still going westward without pause. Still we followed. Out on to the Launceston road; onward, ever onward until the bare hills of Dartmoor frowned upon us, and we had to slacken slightly for the long upward grind. Fortunately the hills were free from mist, and on reaching the summit of Whiddon Down we caught once more a glimpse of the white car before it disappeared in the distance. I was getting reckless, and I took the descent at a pace which blanched even Forrest's cheek. Then through a streak of white houses, which I fancied must be Okehampton. There was no need to inquire the way. At the pace both cars were travelling there was only one road which would serve either Mannering or myself. In fifteen minutes Launceston came into view. Then up again until from the top of Bodmin moor we caught fleeting glimpses of the sea on either side of us.

On still without pause, through Redruth and Camborne and Hayle. Finally a sight of them at last, as we opened up St. Michael's Bay as we came to Marazion. And here I thought the chase had come to an end. I was mistaken.

CHAPTER XXIII

SAVED

My brain reeled as we rushed along the road into Penzance. My forehead seemed to be encircled with a band of steel. My mouth was so parched that my tongue rattled against my palate as I tried to speak to Forrest. My fingers were so cramped with the grip on the steering wheel, a grip which had never once been relaxed during our five hours' run, that I could not relinquish my hold. The road became dark, and involuntarily I cut off the supply of the gas to the motor and brought the car to a standstill.

"Go on, man! Go on!" shouted Forrest in my ear.

I could only gasp for answer. I felt suddenly sick.

Then Forrest gave proof of his ready common sense. He thrust his hand into his pocket and produced the bottle of champagne which had been left over from our lunch, and which he had thoughtfully brought with him in view of some such eventuality as this. Tearing off the wire he cut the string. The cork flew out and the liquor creamed from the neck of the bottle. Pushing up my mask with one hand he held the bottle to my lips with the other.

I spluttered. I choked. But I drank and I drank again. Never surely was champagne more grateful or more useful. My strength returned to me instantaneously. My brain cleared. My eyes saw. My hope returned. I drew a deep sigh of relief. Forrest handed me the bottle again.

"After you," I said.

He took a drink and then remarked authoritatively, "Finish the bottle."

I obeyed and, draining it, tossed it into the hedge and once more set the car in motion. If our progress had been speedy before, when we were once through Penzance, it became absolutely reckless.

My brain was dancing from the effect of the champagne, and a wild exhilaration throbbed in every artery. The pace was tremendous, and we had not left Penzance a couple of miles behind us before the fugitives came once more into view. Now for the first time I could see that we were holding our own in the race. It may have been that some bearing had become heated in the car Mannering was driving, for undoubtedly his new car was more speedy than the old, but it was clear that he could no longer leave us as he had been able to do in the earlier part of the chase. If only I could increase ever so slightly the speed of my car, I felt confident of overtaking him. I motioned to Forrest to bend towards me, and when his ear was level with my mouth, I asked him to throw everything which could be got rid of overboard, in order to lighten the car. He took my

meaning at once, and away went the cushions and rugs. The difference was slight, but still there was a perceptible difference. At the pace we were now travelling the car rocked from side to side of the road, and Forrest had to brace himself stiffly against the footboard to prevent himself being thrown out. But we were gaining foot by foot on the fugitives. I felt a thrill of delight when, on reaching the brow of a hill, I saw the white car only two hundred yards ahead, and reckoned that in a couples of minutes we should have overtaken them.

But one thing I had overlooked. I became conscious that we should soon be at the end of our journey, for suddenly I saw the sea on the horizon. I knew now where we were, knew that the end was in sight. For Mannering there could be no return, and I shouted aloud with exultation when I realized it. We drew closer to him, so close that I fancied I could see his eyes glittering through the mica plate of his mask as he turned to look at us.

A sudden horror gripped me by the throat. He surely must know as well as myself that he was near the spot where all roads ended; that we were barely a mile or two from Land's End. What if he intended to end his life and his journey together? And what if, not content with destroying himself, he were to carry with him to destruction the girl who rode beside him on his car?

We reached within twenty yards of him, and then as

if in answer to my thought, I heard him emit a screech of laughter as his car suddenly shot away from us, and in half a minute placed him at least a quarter of a mile ahead. The bitterness of that moment, as my hope died within me, I can never forget. I only continued the pursuit mechanically.

We thundered through Sennen without pause and so onward until we opened up the hotel and the stretch of green on the brow of the cliff. Then I could have shrieked with delight. The white car was standing still and Mannering had left his seat and was standing by the side. Ten seconds would have brought us to him. Five passed. He leaped again to his seat, and as he did so, the white robed figure sprang from the car to the turf. The Pirate gave a cry of baffled rage. But he had no time to waste in recovering his escaping victim, for we were within fifty yards of him. His car leaped forward and, leaving the road, tossed like a boat at sea over the uneven boulder-strewn turf. We were within five yards of him, and it was as much as we could manage to do to keep our seats.

Just in time I realized the danger into which we were being unwittingly drawn, and reversing the gear, I put on both breaks. I was in time, but only just in time, for we were on a treacherous grassy slope and in spite of the breaks our car continued to glide forward under the impulse of the velocity it had attained.

"Jump for your life!" shouted Forrest.

I had wit enough to obey without hesitation.

As I leaped, my eyes were fixed upon Mannering, who at that moment had reached the very edge of the cliff. I saw him disappear, and then I rolled over on the turf. I was unhurt, and gathering myself together, I regained my feet just as the car which had carried us so well followed the maker over the cliff. A dozen paces took me to the spot. I shuddered as I glanced downwards and saw the fate I had escaped. Two or three hundred feet below the tide was boiling over the jagged rocks. I fancied I could discern a few fragments of the white car and that was all.

Not ten seconds before I had seen Mannering wave his hand at us mockingly as he rode to his death, and I guessed that his intention had been to lure us on to a common destruction. Once again he had disappeared, but now I knew it was for all time.

A strange calm came upon me. Straight in front of us the Longships lighthouse made a pillar of black marble against the huge red disc of the setting sun. In the far distance the Cassiterides floated cloud-like on the horizon. I gulped down a sob of thankfulness, for the memory came upon me that the one whom I loved had been saved by the merest chance from sharing the fate of the madman who had so unhesitatingly rushed upon his doom.

I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was Forrest.

"Our work is done," he said, and with an impatient sigh, he took from his pocket the useless handcuffs and hurled them after the cars. "One thing we have to be

thankful for," he continued, "thank God, Miss Maitland is safe."

For reply, I could only grasp his hands and wring them silently. As I did so, I became conscious that a number of excited people had gathered about us.

"Where—where is she?" I gasped.

Some one pointed to the hotel a hundred yards or so distant, and Forrest and I hurried towards it. I was a prey to the most horrible anxiety. I dreaded to contemplate what the result upon the mind of my darling might be. I had nearly reached the hotel door, when I saw a slight figure step across the threshold and shade her eyes with her hand. With a cry of delight I sprang forward.

The next moment Evie was in my arms.

* * * * *

That is the story of the Motor Pirate. There remain but a few things to say. And first of them, let me explain how it happened that Evie managed to fall into the Pirate's clutches.

I told her later that it was owing to feminine curiosity. She, on the other hand, declares it was entirely owing to her anxiety on my account. Whichever was the reason, the moment she had heard Mannering's car approach, she had gone to the garden-gate, whence she was able to command a view of the coach-house door. She had seen the man Laver rush forward at the sound of the whistle. Then the pistol shot rang out, and the next moment Mannering had appeared on the new car. He

had seen her, and she had attempted to fly to the house, but he had overtaken her and carried her off. Once on the car he had proceeded a short distance on the St. Alban's road, and then stopped to speak to her, for the first and only time on that day.

"I am going to take you for a ride with me, Miss Maitland," he had observed. "I merely wish to warn you before we start, that at the pace we shall travel, you will find any attempt to escape exceedingly dangerous."

It was then from his manner and appearance she had realized that she was in the power of a madman.

As regards the ride, she could tell me very little. The pace was so great that, being unprovided with a mask, she was obliged to crouch down on the seat and cover her face with a rug as a protection against the dust. It seemed an interminable time, she said, and the moment the car stopped she made an attempt to regain her liberty, without knowing how near she was to destruction at the time she made it.

Fortunately the strain had been much less than I expected, so far as Evie was concerned, and much more than I anticipated, was its effect upon myself. It was a long time before I completely recovered from the effects of those three adventurous days. And the worst of it was, that everything combined to prevent me obtaining the absolute quiet which I needed. After spending a night at the hotel I, of course, hastened to take train to London in order to restore Evie to her father. But when I arrived at my place at St. Albans, I found a veritable

army of pressmen encamped on my doorstep. They would not give me a moment's peace. I was compelled to remain in bed, and upon sending a message over to Evie to inform her of my predicament, she informed me that she was similarly besieged.

We exchanged a dozen notes. I rose when it was dark, and slipped out of my back door. I could only see one method of securing quiet. Even a hardened pressman has a dislike to intrude upon the privacy of a newly married couple, so the next morning Evie and Colonel Maitland joined me in town, and we were married by special license and, without returning to St. Albans, we started for my home in Norfolk.

So much for myself.

Forrest was for a long time inconsolable at the final escape of the Pirate from the hands of justice. So was his subordinate, Laver, whose sentiments on the subject are quite too lurid for publication.

As for Mannering, no trace of his body was ever found, though I have since heard that certain portions of the cars have been fished up from the pools amongst the rocks at the base of the cliffs at low tide. At present, however, there has not been sufficient of the machinery recovered to enable any one to construct a similar motor. He had apparently made no drawings, or else had destroyed them when they had served his turn, so it would seem as if the secret of the singularly speedy motor he invented is destined to be lost to the world. Still, it may be that sufficient will be recovered to give some

skilled mechanician sufficient guidance to enable him to reproduce the lost pirate car. If not, well, I don't suppose it matters. Some one else will be sure to invent something similar. In fact, from the hints Mannering gave me, and owing to the opportunity I had of examining the car in his workshop, I think it is not unlikely that I shall shortly be applying for letters patent myself.

CHAPTER XXIV

REVELATIONS

THERE remains only one thing more. I feel that the story would be incomplete if I kept to myself certain particulars concerning Mannering, which have come to my knowledge since the day when he made his sensational flight into eternity from the brow of the cliff at Land's End. At the time, both my wife and myself wished never to hear again the name of the man whose actions had provided us with such terrible and nerve-shattering experiences, but afterwards, when we came to think over the matter, it occurred to both of us that in fact we knew very little about the man who had nearly wrecked our lives. To dwell upon that thought naturally awakened our curiosity concerning his past life, and, needless to say, when the opportunity occurred for gratifying our curiosity, we did not for a moment hesitate about accepting it. It is true that we had gathered from his conversation that he had travelled widely, but in what capacity, or with what object, we knew as little as we knew of his birthplace or parentage. We found, too, a difficulty in understanding the motives which had prompted Mannering's actions, and, though we often discussed the question, we could

never of ourselves have arrived at a satisfactory solution of the problem.

On this latter point I must mention the conclusion arrived at by *The Speaker*. This sober-minded and extremely British review declared that his animating motive was "the strong rock of equity, or abstract justice," inasmuch as, by principally directing his attention to motorists, he was avenging *The Speaker's* quarrel with a class which this journal held in particular abhorrence. Naturally, both Evie and myself smiled at the thought that the Motor Pirate was a conservative gentleman, anxious only to restore to the highways of England something of their pristine calm. For myself, I inclined to the belief that he was a remarkable specimen of the megalomaniac, whose exploits were prompted much more by the desire for notoriety than by any altruistic motive, or even by any sordid consideration regarding the plunder which he secured. Certainly had he been a mere criminal, impelled by the desire for the easy acquisition of wealth, he could have pursued his career for a much longer period than he actually did. As for my wife, with a woman's natural tendency to read a romance into any and every development of human activity, she held fast to the opinion that the Pirate's extraordinary career was the outcome of an overmastering passion for herself. The probability is, that in his brain all these motives operated at different times. The natural love of plunder, inherent in the criminal mind, is as often as not accompanied by a morbid delight in awakening the wonder of the public by the performance

of startling deeds and, in the same temperament, it is not unusual to discover the romantic nature developed to a considerable degree. But, from the data at our command, I fancy it would have been impossible even for the experienced psychologist to decide which, so to speak, was the master impulse.

Perhaps, however, the few facts concerning him, which came into our possession afterwards, tend to clear up these points to some degree. Certainly they left me with a clearer light upon his individuality.

To these facts I am indebted to Inspector Forrest, who, some six months after our famous ride together in pursuit of the pirate, managed to find time to pay a flying visit to our Norfolk home, where we had continued to dwell in peaceful seclusion.

It was at dinner, on the night of his arrival, that Forrest first hinted that he had picked up some details of Mannering's life-history, and of course nothing would content Evie but a promise that we should hear what he had discovered. So, directly the meal was finished, we adjourned for our coffee and cigars to my sanctum, where, in front of a comfortable fire, Forrest made no difficulty about satisfying our curiosity.

"You see," he began, when his cigar was once well alight, "I was every bit as curious as Mrs. Sutgrove."

"Or myself," I interrupted.

"Or Mr. Sutgrove," said the detective, smiling, "for there is precious little difference between the sexes so far as curiosity is concerned, in spite of the generally accepted

opinion on the matter. But being curious, I naturally made the most minute search when I searched his place at St. Alban's. I didn't find much there, it is true, but I did secure a clue which ultimately led me to some lodgings which he had occupied some three or four years previously, and there, by the merest good luck, I discovered that when he had departed he had left behind him a worn-out travelling-bag, and in that bag was a bundle of papers which supplied me with sufficient information to reconstruct his history to some extent, though I should not like to swear to the absolute accuracy of every detail of his biography as I see it."

"Was there nothing at all found at St. Alban's then?" asked Evie.

"I fancy you must have seen in the papers a pretty full account of all that the police discovered there?" said the detective.

"Yes," replied Evie. "We read a lot of stories, but they varied to such an extent that we really did not know what to believe."

Forrest smiled. "Now I come to think of it, the reporters did give their imaginations free reins, but you can take it from me that, with the exception of the plunder he amassed after his return from that Continental trip, and the apparatus for the production of the liquid hydrogen, there was very little in his house of interest to me or you. There was his bank-book, and some correspondence with a learned professor at the Royal Institution. I followed up both clues. At the R. I. I discovered noth-

ing. Mannering had merely posed as a wealthy amateur in chemistry, and of course he met with every assistance when he had asked for help in following up his researches into the behaviour of liquid gases. At his bank also, very little was known about him. When he had come to St. Alban's he had opened an account by a payment into it of six or seven thousand pounds in Bank of England notes. He had drawn steadily upon the account until it was nearly exhausted, and, in point of fact, there was only a few pounds to his credit from the time when he commenced his career on the road, until a week or two after his return from Amsterdam, when he paid in two thousand pounds in gold, and a fortnight later swelled his balance with a similar amount."

"That was the proceeds of the Brighton mail robbery," I remarked.

Forrest nodded. "That was his only really big coup. As for his other plunder, he probably disposed of the proceeds of all his early cruises on the Continent, at the same time that he sold the diamonds. That which he obtained afterwards was found intact in the safe in his bedroom. Heavens! What an opportunity I missed by not taking out a search-warrant for his house. When we paid our midnight visit, there must have been ample evidence behind the steel door to have convicted him."

The detective was silent for awhile, and bit savagely at his cigar.

"He was not a wealthy man, then," I remarked.

"No," replied Forrest. "There was no trace of his

owning any property anywhere, and his expenditure on the gas plant and on his motors — we found that the various parts had been made to specification at a variety of works in England and abroad — had eaten heavily into his capital, so that at the time of the commencement of his career he must have been very nearly penniless. Whether he built the motor with the idea of utilizing it for the purpose he ultimately put it to, of course I cannot say, but I have a shrewd suspicion that he really did design it for the purpose, since from what I have learned of him the predatory instinct must have been pretty strongly developed in him."

The detective paused for a minute, and, flicking the ash off his cigar, gazed meditatively into the fire.

"You shall judge for yourselves," he continued. "Unfortunately, I cannot begin right at the beginning, for I do not know where he was born, nor who his parents were. I can only guess at these facts from the knowledge that, as a boy, he was at school in the south of England, and that then his name was Ram Krishna Roy."

"What?" I asked, in amazement. "A Hindu?"

"An Eurasian, I should fancy," replied Forrest. "He had been sent to school in England by one of those petty Indian princes, who still exercise sovereignty under British suzerainty."

"How did you discover that?" asked Evie.

"It was like this, Mrs. Sutgrove," replied Forrest. "Amongst the papers I spoke about as being in the old portmanteau, were a number of letters written in char-

acters I could not understand. I could see they were oriental, and that was as much as I could make of them, so I took them to a noted oriental scholar who translated them for me. The language was Urdu, and the writer was a munshi, who was obviously communicating with an old pupil. There were so many references to scenes with which the person to whom the letters were addressed, as well as the writer, was familiar, that it was quite clear that the former must have been brought up amidst purely native surroundings. There were one or two more obscure allusions which led me to conclude that the boy's mother must have been a white woman, and from what we saw of him there can be no doubt but that he was white on one side."

"Nobody would have taken him to be aught but an Englishman," murmured Evie.

"No," said Forrest. "I was intensely surprised when I discovered these proofs of his identity and at first I thought they could not apply to him, but before I come to the connecting link, let me mention one curious thing in the letters, which may do something to explain the curious influence which Mannering exerted over Mrs. Sutgrove."

"He hypnotized me, I am sure," declared Evie, decidedly.

"Very possibly," replied the detective. "In nearly every letter was to be found an admonition to the effect — I cannot give you a verbatim translation — that the writer hoped his old pupil would not forget that to him

was entrusted the secret power of Siva, which would, by practice, enable him to mould all men to his will."

"If he had possessed that," I interrupted, "there would have been no necessity for him to have practised piracy on the highroad."

"True," said Forrest. "But it is quite possible that Mrs. Sutgrove's conjecture is correct, and that even at that early age Mannering had learnt something about hypnotism from his native instructor, for I am very certain that of these semi-occult sciences, the East has much more precise knowledge than is realized by the Western world."

"Very likely," said my wife, shuddering slightly at the remembrance. "He certainly had a most singular power over me."

"He probably increased his knowledge when he returned to his native land, which, I gathered, must have taken place when he was about seventeen. Then there is a break for nearly ten years in his history."

"I don't quite see how you connect Ram Krishna Roy with Mannering," I interpolated.

"I'm coming to that," replied Forrest. "With these letters was another in its original envelope addressed in the same hand to Julian Mannering at San Francisco. It was the most interesting letter of the lot. It was full of reproaches addressed to the dear pupil, who had cut himself off from the asceticism of the East, and devoted himself to the gross materialism of Western civilization. It concluded by the expression of an intention to once more

attempt to persuade him to return by a personal appeal. On the back of the letter was a note in Mannering's handwriting. 'Old Chatterji kept his promise. I had quite a long conversation with him in the ballroom last night. Everybody thought I was drunk or mad to be talking Hindustani, apparently to empty air. However, that's the last of him. I've done with the East.'".

"You make him more a man of mystery than ever," I exclaimed.

"I can't help it," said Forrest. "Perhaps his old tutor really did appear to him. Perhaps Mannering was mad. Who knows? Both are dead. However, he seems to have carried out his intention of not returning to India. Ram Krishna Roy disappeared from that time forth, and Julian Mannering took his place. He seems to have been doing nothing at San Francisco at the time, but a little later he appears to have accepted an appointment as engineer to a mine in Arizona. He left the berth suddenly a few months later, owing to some trouble about the wife of one of the miners. The miner was shot, and his comrades were so incensed that Mannering had to depart hot-foot. Then for awhile I can only guess at his occupation from some newspaper cuttings which he had preserved. These point to his identification with the leader of a gang of desperadoes whose most notable exploit was the successful holding up of a train which had a considerable quantity of specie on board."

"I remember him describing the affair," said Evie,

"though he represented himself as on the side of the attacked."

"The only assistance he gave to the plundered was to assist them to a better land by the aid of his gun. He escaped, though, and made his way to Australia, and once again he resumed the practice of his profession, — mining engineering. For three or four years he was engaged at a newly-opened mine in the northern territory of West Australia. But instinct was too strong for him. He must really have had a strong dash of the blood of some of those Indian hill-tribe freebooters in his veins, for he never seems to have been able to resist the prospect of plunder, and the likelihood of having to fight for it seems to have been an additional inducement. Thus, at the mine, under his charge, it was the custom to send, periodically, the gold extracted, under a strong escort, to the nearest town, some forty miles distant. For a long time these consignments were delivered with perfect safety. Then, after a particularly rich vein had been struck, it became necessary to forward a very large consignment of bullion. Contrary to the usual practice, only two men were sent in charge of it. Their dead bodies were afterwards discovered, and the gold was never recovered. No one seems to have had the least suspicion that the gentlemanly engineer at the mine was likely to have had something to do with the business, and when, shortly afterward, he resigned his post and took a passage to Europe, he received the highest possible testimonials from his manager and directors. I have no doubt, myself,

that he was the prime mover in the robbery, for his salary was a small one, and directly afterwards he spent six months in Paris, where his expenditure would have been lavish for a millionaire."

"That was where my father met him," remarked Evie. "I remember him expressing surprise at the simplicity of Mannering's life at St. Alban's in view of the luxury with which he had been surrounded when they had met previously."

"Just so," said the detective. "But his Paris career ended as it had commenced. He disappeared suddenly, without a word of farewell to any of his acquaintance, and had it not been for one bit of evidence, I should have had not the slightest idea as to what he had been doing with himself in the interval between that time and his arrival at St. Alban's. You may remember that a scientific expedition was despatched by the Dutch government about six years ago to make some investigations in the interior of New Guinea?"

I shook my head.

"It started six months after Mannering disappeared from Paris, and from the time it left Batavia *en route* for New Guinea not a word has ever been heard of it."

"You cannot mean to infer that Mannering had anything to do with that?" I asked, incredulously.

"I infer nothing," replied Forrest. "But I do know that a pocketbook, which had belonged to a chemist attached to the exploring party, was one of the documents I found in his bag. The book contained a number of

notes upon the liquefaction of gases, and these may very likely have first interested Mannering in the subject. As I have since discovered from a search of the registers at Lloyds that there were quite a number of ships lost about the same time in those seas, I cannot help thinking that our friend had served an apprenticeship under the black flag at sea before taking to land piracy."

"At that rate he must have been the greatest criminal on earth," I declared.

"He was certainly the biggest I ever came across," replied Forrest, "and my only regret is that I was unable to secure him in order that he might have judicially paid the penalty for his crimes."

"It was a pity," I said, "though I fancy if we had trapped him he would have found some means of cheating the gallows and making a melodramatic exit from the world."

"It is more than likely," said Forrest. "He was not the ordinary type of criminal. I was speaking to a big mental specialist the other day, and — but I had better complete the story of his career first. Where did we leave him?"

"New Guinea," I prompted.

"The only other reason I have for suspecting him of being engaged in deeds of violence in that quarter of the globe is that he returned to England *via* Singapore, with a considerable quantity of bullion in his possession. The rest of his history you know."

"He seems to have had a stirring existence, anyhow,"

I commented. "And one hardly sees any reason for it save natural sin."

"The alienist I was talking to the other day described him as a moral pervert. He said he was a type of insanity usually associated with physical incapacity or a low order of intelligence, but when, as in Mannering's case, both physique and intelligence were above the average, the moral pervert is a greater danger to the community than an army of ordinary criminals. If ever I said a prayer it would be when a madman of that type was removed from the world."

"Amen," said both Evie and I, heartily.

THE END.